

**The Novel and the Short Story in Ireland:
Readership, Society and Fiction, 1922-1965.**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis considers the novel and the short story in the decades following the achievement of Irish independence from Britain in 1922. During these years, many Irish practitioners of the short story achieved both national and international acclaim, such that 'the Irish Short Story' was recognised as virtually a discrete genre. Writers and critics debated why Irish fiction-writers could have such success in the short story, but not similar success with their novels. Henry James had noticed a similar situation in the United States of America in the early nineteenth century. James decided the problem was that America's society was still forming - that the society was too 'thin' to support successful novel-writing. Irish writers and critics applied his arguments to the newly-independent Ireland, concluding that Irish society was indeed the explanation. Irish society was depicted as so unstructured and fragmented that it was inimical to the novel but nurtured the short story. Ireland was described variously: "broken and insecure" (Colm Tóibín), "often bigoted, cowardly, philistine and spiritually crippled" (John McGahern) and marked by "inward-looking stagnation" (Dermot Bolger). This study examines the validity of these assertions about Irish society, considering whether day-to-day life in Ireland was so exceptionally different to other contemporary states where the novel did prosper. The conclusion from the evidence is that Ireland was different but not unique. One chapter examines literacy and the reading traditions in Ireland, and it is clear that there was a skilled audience for the novels and an effective book trade. The novel in Ireland is discussed and three case studies (Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Liam O'Flaherty) are considered. The study concludes with the confirmation, through two case studies (Séan O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor), that the short story continued to be widely acclaimed and widely practised by many Irish writers. The conclusion reached is that Irish society was not as popularly depicted nor was it exceptional. It was a matter of writers' talents not society's failings.

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NOTE ON BIBLIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICE

1. Throughout this study, titles of books, periodicals and journals are italicized.
2. As many of the novels of the period are now unobtainable, only the novels that have been sourced and read are given with full publishing details.
3. Dates of newspaper articles and similar are given in the form: (29.03.2016).
4. Dates of Dáil and Séanad Debates are give in the form: 29 March 2016.
5. Legislation is given in the form: the Censorship of Publications Act (1929).

Introduction: **"Ah, Wisha! The Irish Novel"**

Henry James, discussing the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne, stated his proposition simply:

the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion. American civilization has hitherto had other things to do than to produce flowers, and before giving birth to writers it has wisely occupied itself with providing something for them to write about.¹

Seán O'Faoláin, in his insightful critical analysis 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters' (1949), applied James's assertion about the needs of the novel to the Irish literary context, whilst adding the contrast with the short story. In this critique of newly-independent Ireland, he concludes: "In such an unshaped society there are many subjects for little pieces, that is for the short story writer: the novelist or the dramatist loses himself in the general amorphism, unthinkingness, brainlessness, egalitarianism and general unsophistication".² Following James, he directly links context and form. The society is an amalgam of the outmoded colonial-day attitudes and the greediness of the new elites. In such a fragmented world, it is only the short story, with its focus on fragments, and peopled by the excluded, that can narrate that society.

This assertion that post-independent Ireland's society and its attitudes created a milieu inimical to the writing of successful novels but conducive to the

¹Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: MacMillan, 1879), 3.

² Seán O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', *The Month*, Vol.2, No. 6 (1949), 375-76.

composition of short stories was to be propounded by many other writers and critics over the years. Nearly forty years on, Colm Tóibín argued that Ireland at independence was "a country where history wiped out any hope of us forming a cohesive, safe, secure, well-adjusted, class-ridden society." He sees instead "something broken and insecure", leading him to ask:

How can the novel flourish in such a world? The novel explores psychology, sociology, the individual consciousness; the novel finds a form and a language for these explorations. We require an accepted world for the novel to flourish, a shared sense of time and place.³

That the argument still remains plausible is suggested, nearly sixty years on from O'Faoláin's analysis, by Declan Kiberd's assertion that "Novels deal with already made societies, and Ireland in 1904 was still a society in the making. The short story or anecdote was designed to describe a submerged, colonised people, whereas the novel was more suited to the calibrated world of social classes."⁴

These assertions cannot be proved, being based on reasoned, but subjective, opinions about aesthetic qualities and values, but they are susceptible to the weight of evidence from examples. Most of the critics who do propound the case offer some reasoning, if not always much evidence. In his analysis, Henry James argued that Hawthorne was not a realist writer, and certainly his characters were not imitative of realistic types, "But none the less, Hawthorne's work savours thoroughly of the local

³ Colm Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', in Dermot Bolger (ed.), *Letters from the New Island* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1991), 45.

⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 34.

soil – it is redolent of the social system in which he had his being.”⁵ James ascribes the weaknesses he perceives in Hawthorne’s work to the crudity and simplicity of that society, noting “It takes so many things, as Hawthorne must have felt later in life, when he made the acquaintance of the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle – it takes such an accumulation of history and custom, such a complexity of manners and types, to form a fund of suggestion for the novelist.”⁶ He then provides an image of the youthful innocence that attended the creation of the United States – an image that would have resonated with that first generation of writers in the newly-independent Ireland for whom everything must have seemed possible with the exciting dawn of this new, and hard-won, era. James explains:

History, as yet, has left in the United States but so thin and impalpable a deposit that we very soon touch the hard sub-stratum of nature; and nature herself, in the western world, has the peculiarity of seeming rather crude and immature. The very air looks new and young; the light of the sun seems fresh and innocent, as if it knew as yet but few of the secrets of the world and none of the weariness of shining; the vegetation has the appearance of not having reached its majority.⁷

Among the many writers anxious to help create the literature of the new Ireland while the very air still looked young, and the light of the sun still seemed fresh and innocent, were Seán O’Faoláin and Frank O’Connor. By 1922, both young men had established their right to a respectful hearing through their roles, though relatively

⁵ James, *Hawthorne*, 5.

⁶ James, *Hawthorne*, 43.

⁷ James, *Hawthorne*, 12-13.

minor, in the armed struggle for independence, and then by participating on the Republican side in the short but violent civil war that followed Irish partition. Now they were setting out on careers as writers. In his autobiography *Vive Moi!* O'Faoláin recalls his arrival back in Cobh in 1929 from his stay at Harvard:

I now knew or thought I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to write about this sleeping country, those sleeping fields, those sleeping villages spread before my eyes under the summer moon. Whether I did so or not, in any realistic sense of those words, remained to be seen.⁸

However, O'Faoláin's optimistic hopes to write about his sleeping country through the medium of the novel were to prove a disappointment. Reviewing in 1962 the previous fifty years of Irish writing, O'Faoláin outlined his views of the impact on its writers of the society that had developed in the new State. Having outlined his analysis of the new political and intellectual environment, he drew the conclusion: "one of the most striking effects of all this on Irish letters in the period before us is the comparative failure of the modern Irish novel. If one were to exclude Joyce – which would be like saying if one were to exclude Everest – and Liam O'Flaherty how little is left."⁹

O'Faoláin and O'Connor were not alone in seeing the nature of the first decades of independence as stultifying for novelists. Colm Tóibín, writing in 1987 and aware of revisionist views about the period, still reaches a similar conclusion:

⁸ Seán O'Faoláin, *Vive Moi!* (1963) (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), 245.

⁹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing', *Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 201 (Spring, 1962), 102.

We look as well at the sort of fiction we have produced; we find that, except in a few short stories by Frank O'Connor and Seán O Faoláin and a few novels by Liam O'Flaherty which deal with the excitement of war, almost nowhere between 1920 and 1960 is this society and its relationship with the individual destiny seriously examined or dramatised, explored or exploited in works of fiction.¹⁰

Accepting the inadequacies of their own realist novels, and recognising that their contemporaries had not succeeded either, led both O'Faoláin and O'Connor to search for an explanation for the perceived failure of the novel format given that the quality of short story writing in Ireland was internationally recognised. It is remarkable to note the short story writers who flourished in those four decades and who gained international reputations. These would include Liam O'Flaherty, Seán O'Faoláin, Frank O'Connor, Mary Lavin and Elizabeth Bowen. Other writers, too, had success with the form without necessarily being well-known outside Ireland, including Daniel Corkery, James Stephens, Michael McLaverty, Bryan MacMahon, Patrick Kavanagh, Patrick Boyle and Flann O'Brien. Terence Brown, noting how so many Irish writers have excelled at the form, argues that, "Furthermore, Irish writers have written stories that are sufficiently distinctive in the context of writing in the English language to warrant the term 'the Irish short story'."¹¹ In contrast, the only realist novelists with any degree of lasting critical acclaim in these decades are Liam O'Flaherty, Kate O'Brien and Elizabeth Bowen. As David Marcus summarises:

¹⁰ Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', 51.

¹¹ Terence Brown, 'Sean O'Faolain and the Irish Short Story', in Marie Arndt et al. (eds), *Sean O'Faolain: A Centenary Celebration* (Turin: Tauben, 2001), 59.

The Irish pre-eminence in the field of the short story has frequently been remarked upon by commentators, both native and foreign. But what accounts for such pre-eminence? How is it that a country that boasts no notable tradition of novel-writing repeatedly throws up outstanding short story writers?¹²

Unfortunately, Marcus's own answer is inadequate. He claims that Irish short story writers share two 'prominent Irish characteristics' that are vital to the short story – a special 'way of seeing' and 'way of saying'. As well as being a contentious view about shared national traits, it seems contradicted by the authors themselves, whose work demonstrates very different and individuated ways of both seeing and saying.

Seán O'Faoláin in *The Short Story* (1948) points out differences of purpose, style and technique between the novel and the short story genres, noting the difficulties of being a writer equally at home in both.¹³ This simple judgement disguises the agonising that O'Faoláin undertook trying to analyse why his novels, just like Frank O'Connor's, were considered second-rate. He knew that it was as a talented short-story writer he would be remembered, and he brooded over why a writer with such fiction-writing skills was judged unsuccessful as a novelist. He came to consider that the form failed because of the context – the Ireland of the day. Years before writing his novels, in fact before leaving Harvard in 1929, O'Faoláin already had his doubts. There he had become critically aware of Henry James's study of Nathaniel Hawthorne and his depiction of life in New England. O'Faoláin

¹²David Marcus, *Irish Short Stories. Volume Two* (London: New English Library, 1982), 10.

¹³ Seán O'Faoláin, *The Short Story* (1948) (Cork: Mercier Press, 1972), 13-46

quotes James's comments on Hawthorne's achievements, and his summary of his settings: "Everything...indicates a simple, democratic, thinly composed society". O'Faoláin proceeds to suggest, "One may read it with modern Ireland in mind, comparing happily or uncomfortably."¹⁴ O'Faoláin states his application of James' theory to Ireland: "We see this very clearly in Ireland today where the stratified, and fairly complex social life which a writer of 1915, say, could have known in Dublin has given way to a far more simple and uncomplex, a much "thinner" social life."¹⁵ This concept of the poverty of the context dictating the success of literary forms is central to his critical thinking. In *Vive Moi!* he returns to the thesis, asking "Was Henry James right after all when he said the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep?"¹⁶ Clearly O'Faoláin thinks so.

Terence Brown claims that "O'Faoláin's short stories are more successful works of art than his novels because they are less ambitious; they wisely settle for what the author believes is possible in a thinly composed society."¹⁷ O'Faoláin had not easily settled for his disappointed ambitions for a realist school of Irish novelists, though he had long recognised the problem of inadequate material arising from an

¹⁴O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', 372.

¹⁵O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', 373.

¹⁶ O'Faoláin, *Vive Moi!*, 263.

¹⁷Terence Brown, *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays* (Mullingar: Lilliput Press, 1988), 103.

Irish life that was so 'thin'. In his 1962 analysis of the 'comparative failure of the modern Irish novel', O'Faoláin summarised his reasoning:

that Irish life in our period does not provide the *dramatis personae*, ready for the hard conflicts, the readiness to take anything *jusqu'au bout* in either full or at least some awareness of what is at stake, without which dramatic themes for the novel are missing. We produce spurts of spirit. They end in laughter (the great national vice or virtue) or exile.

This may be why, on the other hand, the Short Story has thriven in the meantime, and this is probably the best product of our period. The successes here have been so numerous that I need not even mention names. They have been wise to choose the smaller, yet revealing themes in the absence of the larger, more dramatic ones.¹⁸

O'Faoláin considered that two key ingredients missing during these decades was 'awareness' – which he associated with an element of self-conflict – and a complex structured society. He claimed that "the change-over from a stratified society – ranging from aristocrat to outcast – to a one-class society, where there are not native aristocrats and no outcasts (except the writers?), and where the hard, traditional core is in a farming population, rarely induces a fertile awareness either among people or writers."¹⁹ His argument remains an assertion of his opinion, difficult to prove with empirical evidence, but a reasoned opinion, nevertheless, from an experienced observer, and a perceptive social commentator, literary critic and successful writer.

Frank O'Connor's study of the novel and eminent novelists, *The Mirror in the Roadway* (1956), provides his depiction of the novel form which he centres on the

¹⁸ O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing', 102.

¹⁹ O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing', 103.

individual within a stratified society: "The novel, when it came, would be primarily domestic and civic, would concentrate on the study of society and the place of the individual in it, and on the structure of the classes, professions, and trades rather than on the mythological or historical past".²⁰ This concept of the novel carries into his *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*,²¹ which presents a series of studies of acknowledged masters of the short story, preceded by an introduction that espouses his own theories. The central argument is that the short story is a distinct art form. He argues that whilst the novel and the short story derive from the same source there are crucial differences. He explains that readers approach the novel and the short story differently, but cannot work out the how and why of this. He continues:

When I first dealt with it I had merely noticed the peculiar geographical distribution of the novel and the short story. For some reason Czarist Russia and modern America seemed to be able to produce both great novels and great short stories, while England, which might be called without exaggeration the homeland of the novel, showed up badly when it came to the short story. On the other hand my own country, which had failed to produce a single novelist, had produced four or five storytellers who seemed to me to be first-rate.

I traced these differences very tentatively, but – on the whole, as I now think, correctly – to a difference in the national attitude to society.²²

Unlike the short story, for O'Connor the novel needs a normal society and a central hero with whom the reader can identify:

²⁰ Frank O'Connor, *The Mirror in the Roadway* (1956) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 12.

²¹ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1963) (New Jersey: Melville House, 2004).

²² O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 19.

One character at least in any novel must represent the reader in some aspect of his own conception of himself – as the Wild Boy, the Rebel, the Dreamer, the Misunderstood Idealist – and this process of identification invariably leads to some concept of normality and to some relationship – hostile or friendly – with society as a whole. People are abnormal insofar as they frustrate the efforts of such a character to exist in what he regards as a normal universe, normal insofar as they support him. There is not only the Hero, there is also the Semi-Hero and the Demi-Semi-Hero. I should almost go so far as to say that without the concept of a normal society – the novel is impossible.²³

This concept of a normal society, and his judgement that it did not exist yet in his Ireland, led O'Connor to an inevitable conclusion: "There has been no development comparable with the development of the short story, such as would make it possible for a critic to speak of the Irish novel, and the reason is plain. There is no place in Irish life for the priest or the teacher, no future for them but emigration, as in Moore, or resignation, as in Corkery."²⁴ In O'Connor's reasoning, the Ireland of the day had no interest in the religious order and educated enlightenment that he assumes 'normal' societies value highly. O'Connor explained that the novel is marked by chronological time necessary to develop both character and plot, while the short story focuses only on the critical moment and its impact on the individual. The core of the short story for O'Connor is, like James Joyce before him, the epiphanic moment, the impact of an incident that provokes a life-changing insight. The short story can succeed because it only needs that moment and that individual – it has no need of a stable society.

²³ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 16-17.

²⁴ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 199.

The argument put forward by O'Faoláin and O'Connor, that the short story has no need for a stable society – indeed responds well to a fractured society – is supported by Tóibín:

In a society such as ours with no real core, no past which stretches back in identifiable ways, where there were no fixed festivals until the 1950s except religious ones, where there is mass emigration at each slump in the economic life of the country, in a society which is inexact, chaotic, defensive, nervous, only slowly beginning to form, the writing of short stories is a suitable solution to the writer's dilemma.²⁵

The argument that a stable society is essential for the realist novel is regularly stated by Declan Kiberd. In discussing one of the period's outstanding novelists and novels, Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room*, he asks: "How can you write a novel of manners about a society that has none?" and immediately replies by confirming his belief in James's thesis:

That notorious question asked of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century has also been raised in the case of Ireland. Artists would have liked to employ the novel to chronicle the quotidian life of the emerging Catholic middle class, but the social conditions were too inflamed to admit of such treatment. Ireland was a land of extremes, in which a few fabulously rich persons scarcely noticed the immiseration all around them, but it was hardly a land suitable to the middle range of human experience, which was the staple of most novelists. The form of the novel presupposes a made society: Ireland's was a society still in the making.²⁶

That a stable society is vital for a realist novel is accepted by Terry Eagleton when explaining why James Joyce was obliged to use an experimental mode. He suggests

²⁵ Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', 48.

²⁶ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), 556.

that the social and political conditions of the day meant the realist novel was not available for him:

Irish history was indeed notoriously crisis-ridden and disrupted, a story of wars, rebellions, famines and emigrations with little of the cultural continuity of Britain. Literary realism depends on a degree of social stability and continuity, and there was precious little of that in the turbulent history of Ireland.²⁷

Kiberd makes a similar point. Discussing the experimental novels of both Joyce and Flann O'Brien, he suggests:

Both men's vaunted experiments with the English novel arise from their sense that the form does not truly fit the Irish experience that they seek to record. The English novel describes a land of stable gradations of made lives, whereas Irish writers must depict a land of instability, of lives in the making.²⁸

In 2011, Derek Hand in his *A History of the Irish Novel*, dismissed these propositions as a fabrication. "The major misconception", he writes, "is that there is no such thing as an Irish novel. Or if there is, it is but a pale imitation of what a real novel ought to be." He argues:

The flawed mirror through which literary critics, especially, have usually approached the novel in Ireland is an invention of the 1940s and 1950s. Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain, in keeping with the notion that the novel was a harbinger of order and stability and mesmerised by the thought of a 'grand tradition', argued that the novel form was best suited to 'made' societies and cultures. Therefore, the argument goes, the prose form best suited to articulating the Irish experience of becoming, along with the provisional nature of modern Irish culture is the short story. The short story's obvious links to orality also suggests its distinctive receptiveness to rendering an Irish reality.

²⁷Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2005), 281.

²⁸Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 175.

What might be overlooked is that neither O'Faolain nor O'Connor were particularly adept in the art of the novel and it suited both to champion a rationale for their inability to express themselves expertly within the form.

Hand has chosen to target O'Faoláin and O'Connor and to ignore the similar opinions expressed by McGahern, Tóibín, Trevor and others. Hand is simply alleging both incompetence as novelists and critics, and an unknowable psychological motivation – self-justification – that the two authors allegedly share. Furthermore, he reasserts his insight into the unknowable when arguing that: “Another influencing factor is that, despite O'Faoláin's and O'Connor's desire for an Irish novel, they secretly abhor its utterly disposable nature with its obvious links to the mediocrity of the present moment, and how it runs counter to the prevailing revivalist desire to raise literary efforts into the realm of immutable art.”²⁹

The considered opinions of Irish practitioners of the novel demand attention, because it is they who have to struggle with the demands of the form within the realities of the Irish context. They also are likely to have the novelist's insights into the reasons for the failures and successes of their predecessors, as, striving to perfect their own creative art, they learn lessons from analysing others. John McGahern, who began publishing his novels in the 1960s, four decades after the establishment of the State, was, with the possible exceptions of Liam O'Flaherty and Kate O'Brien, the first Irish realist novelist to receive literary acclaim. Writing about the stories of Alistair MacLeod, he states his view:

²⁹Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2, 4.

I think of the novel as the most social of all the art forms, the most closely linked to an idea of society, a shared leisure and a system of manners. The short story does not generally flourish in such a society but comes into its own like song or prayer or superstition in poorer more fragmented communities where individualism and tradition and family and localities and chance or luck are dominant.³⁰

McGahern had difficult times in the 1960s as the target of the State as employer, and as literary censor; and he recognised that the society of the newly independent state had been just as wanting, as he claimed:

The true history of the thirties, forties and fifties in this country has yet to be written. When it does, I believe it will be shown to have been a very dark time indeed, in which an insular church colluded with an insecure State to bring about a society that was often bigoted, intolerant, cowardly, philistine, and spiritually crippled.³¹

By the 1960s, Ireland had used those four decades to develop a knowable society. People had journeyed from being subjects to being citizens, and in a country beginning to look outwards with a new confidence. The society of the 1960s, though moving in a more positive direction, may still not have been the one that many had hoped for in 1922, but a structured society it was. The society as it had developed may have dictated the darkness of some of McGahern's work, but it did, if Henry James was right, at last provide the conditions for the novel to succeed.

³⁰John McGahern, *Love of the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 212.

³¹John McGahern, quoted in Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk along the Irish Border* (London: Picador, 2001), 79.

William Trevor, another writer like his contemporary McGahern noted for both his short stories and his novels, also addressed the reason for the Irish novel's failure to flourish even as the short story thrived:

It is occasionally argued that the Irish genius for the short story is related to the fact that when the novel reared its head Ireland wasn't ready for it. This is certainly true. In England for instance, the great Victorian novel had been fed by the architecture of a rich, stratified society in which complacency and hypocrisy, accompanied by the ill-treatment of the unfortunate and the poor, provided both fictional materials and grounds for protest. Wealth had purchased leisure and a veneer of sophistication for the up-and-coming middle classes; stability at home was the jewel in the imperial crown. In Ireland there was disaffection, repressed religion, the confusion of two languages, and the spectre of famine.³²

These widely-held, and regularly rehearsed, opinions about the reasons for the perceived failure of the realist novel in the first four decades of the independent State, especially in contrast with the acknowledged success of the short story, were occasionally challenged. Paddy Bullard, in his review of *The Faber Book of Best New Stories, 2004-5*, summarised the claims made by O'Connor, O'Faoláin and what he terms the 'Cork School' of writers:

Their argument is that a top-heavy bourgeois genre like the novel could never thrive in the provisional culture of the post-1922 Republic: only the "pure story-telling" of short fiction, with its quick-minded sympathy for the marginal and dispossessed, would flourish among the constraints of an emerging nation.

³²William Trevor (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiv.

He then makes the point, "The relevance of their arguments is now much in need of review".³³ Such a review could consider the validity of the assertions that the novel genre, as contrasted with the short story, needs a structured society for success; that in the four decades after independence, despite short fiction writing of high quality, Irish realist novels were markedly unsuccessful; that the Irish social and literary context between 1922 and 1960 was indeed inimical to quality novel writing.

Critical theorists of the novel genre have done much to delineate the essence of the novel, while accepting that it is a genre resistant to exact definition and is constantly evolving. Two requisites emerge as crucial – differentiated and individualized characters acting within a stratified and ordered society. The argument put at its simplest runs like this: novels in the main are about people, all people operate in a society, so a society is essential to the novel. Indeed, the relationship has been assumed to be so comprehensive that the reverse is also true: the novel can be seen as essential to the society. The novelist and critic Malcolm Bradbury, while questioning the many direct assumptions that have been made in the past, still argues: "None the less, the inescapable fact remains: literature is an aspect of society. It coheres, structures and illuminates many of its most profound meanings." Bradbury asserts simply that "Writing is the dramatic enactment of characters in social situations".³⁴

³³ Paddy Bullard, 'In the world of Nora Barnacle', *Times Literary Supplement* (13.05.2005), 21.

³⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), xii, xiv.

Ian Watt, in his 1957 *Rise of the Novel*, argued that the novel genre arose in close correlation with the rise of the middle class. Noting that the reading public in the early eighteenth century “still did not extend much further down the social scale than to tradesmen and shopkeepers, with the important exception of the more favoured apprentices and indoor servants”, he indicates how this reading public was changing:

Still, there had been additions, and they had been mainly recruited from among the increasingly prosperous and numerous social groups concerned with commerce and manufacture. This is important, for it is probably this change alone, even if it was of comparatively minor proportions, may have altered the centre of gravity of the reading public sufficiently to place the middle class as a whole in a dominating position for the first time.³⁵

The effect of this dominating position of the middle class on the literature produced was evolutionary. Reading for pleasure and amusement eventually began to replace reading for classical enlightenment and reflection. The changing audience and its tastes and preferences – especially the values of the commercial and manufacturing groups, and of the women of different occupations – was to be reflected over time in the styles and content of subsequent novels. As the patronage of literature by the traditional elites, with their vested interest in maintaining the status quo, passed to the book producers and sellers with a market interest in popular demand, a greater freedom was afforded the writers to reflect the changed attitudes and interests of the new audience.

³⁵ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 49, 50.

The majority of literary critics theorizing about the origins of the novel form seem to accept Watt's general thesis that the genre emerges in a close relationship with an increasingly influential bourgeoisie. Arnold Kettle, in his exploration of "why did the modern novel arise at all", offers a number of hypotheses, including:

Or the novel, we may say, arose with the growth for the first time of a large, widely distributed reading public; with the increase in literacy the demand for reading material naturally rose and the demand was greatest among well-to-do women who were the insatiable novel-readers of the time.

Kettle offers a further possibility: "Or the novel, we may say, grew with the middle class, a new art form based not on aristocratic patronage but on commercial publishing, an art form written by and for the now-powerful commercial bourgeoisie".³⁶ For Kettle, the key era of societal change was the seventeenth century, during which the once-feudal power of the land-owning elites, based on the predominance of an agricultural economy, was slowly eroded as economic power moved into the new towns and cities. As the unity of an agricultural life changed and fragmented with the towns' development of commerce and manufacture, so the divisions of labour proliferated and a stratified class structure evolved. Kettle comments, "Great revolutions in human society change men's consciousness and revolutionise not only their social

³⁶ Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel. Volume 1* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 28.

relationships but their outlook, their philosophy and their art".³⁷ The novel was part of their art's revolution.

Ralph Fox, writing in 1937, had seen a similar connection: the demise of feudal society inevitably killing off its literary medium, the epic, to be replaced by the bourgeoisie and their novel:

The novel is the epic art form of our modern, bourgeois, society; it reached its full stature in the youth of that society, and it appears to be affected by bourgeois society's decay in our own time. We can even say that not only is the novel the most typical creation of bourgeois literature, it is also its greatest creation.³⁸

It is significant to note that Fox considered that the novel form was in decline in England in the 1920s and 1930s, a warning about seeing the situation in Ireland as always exceptional, and counselling the need to see Ireland within an international perspective.

Both Watt and Kettle, in their choice of novelists to illustrate their arguments, assume that the development of the novel in Europe, and in England particularly, is effectively the development of the genre in general. This contentious assumption may cast doubt on their conclusions as to the origins of the novel genre, but less so on their explanations of the novel's essence – its central concerns with an individual character in action within a complex society of differentiated individuals. Northrop

³⁷ Kettle, *An Introduction*, 28.

³⁸ Ralph Fox, *The Novel and The People* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), 42.

Frye agrees. For him, "The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their *personae* or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness".³⁹

While the 'emerging middle class – emerging novel' thesis has been simply stated, its critical advocates have always recognised the complexities that lie within it. Lennard Davis, pointing out that "the predilections of a rising middle class in one country do not preclude the development of differing predilections in another country", argues:

The argument for this transnational development is not to be discounted, and of course there is much credibility to the idea that the rise of the middle class brought into being a universal reaction of European cultures to this economic restructuring. One does feel somewhat sorry for the rising middle classes having to bear the burden of so many cultural changes since it would seem that the rise of the middle class and industrialization are the processes (along with sublimation and repression) that have been used as prime movers of almost all change. The weakness of the middle class hypothesis is not that it is incorrect but only that it is incomplete.⁴⁰

For Davis, this incompleteness has to do with the determinism that is implied. He argues "One needs to know why increased leisure time necessarily leads to novel-reading particularly and not billiard-playing or taking excessively long walks."⁴¹

³⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 305.

⁴⁰ Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 42-43.

⁴¹ Davis, *Factual Fictions*, 43.

Fox makes clear the necessary association of the novel with the individual seen in action against the backdrop of a complex society of other individuals:

The novel deals with the individual, it is the epic of the struggle of the individual against society, against nature, and it could only develop in a society where the balance between man and society was lost, where man was at war with his fellows or with nature.⁴²

Simultaneous with the emergence of an increasingly differentiated and stratified society, Watt identified an important change in the pursuit of truth, which also promoted the emergence of the novel. Until the seventeenth century the major test of truth was assumed to be conformity to accepted tradition. Following the teachings of Descartes, there was a radical intellectual movement to see the pursuit of truth as necessarily a personal and individual matter. Watt claims, "The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating experience", and argues:

This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience – individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named.⁴³

Historians of the novel have emphasised the novel/society association by illustrating how the novel developed out of a particular set of changing social

⁴² Fox, *The Novel and the People*, 44.

⁴³ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 13.

conditions. Literary critics of the realist novel have been interested in how effectively the novel has gone on to reflect society. Other critics have gone further in appreciating the novel's ability not merely to recreate society, but to actively evaluate, criticise and influence it. In discussing the work of Raymond Williams, Stephen Regan points out:

Williams makes a decisive break with the usual formulation of the novel *and* society, and offers instead the much more dynamic idea of the novel *in* society. In Williams's estimation, the novel is not *adjacent* to society but deeply implicated *within* it; it is not a mere product of society but an active constituent, helping to shape the ideas and values by which a society comes to know itself.⁴⁴

O'Faoláin, O'Connor and that first generation of independent Ireland's novelists seem to have been driven by a similar motivation, a concern that literature should help shape the new State. For Williams, society was not a static, definable entity but a constantly changing and developing interconnected series of relationships, values and mores. He sees the novelist as one active agent influencing the society within which it has this dynamic function. For him, society was not a product of history but an on-going process of relationships; and the novel was not a product of society but a process in society's development: "The society and the novels – our general names for those myriad and related primary activities – came from a pressing and varied

⁴⁴ Quoted in Dennis Walder (ed.), *The Realist Novel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 99.

experience which was not yet history; which had no new forms, no significant moments, until these were made and given by direct human actions".⁴⁵

Even if that first generation of Free State writers did not articulate how they saw their art as part of the process of nation-building, it was reflected in their despair when they assessed that they had failed to influence that new society. They had missed an unrepeatable opportunity. One possible contributory factor has been suggested by Kiberd in his consideration of parallels between the independence decades of India and Ireland. "The sheer effort of removing the occupier", he argues, "had proven so great that, in India as in Ireland, there was little left over for reimagining the national condition, and every new disappointment drained a little more colour from once-hopeful faces."⁴⁶ This unique period – the founding of a new state – had held the possibility of real change. The long-established colonial government was replaced by men who had borne arms against it. Political power had radically changed, and, in a spirit of freedom and opportunity, it could have enabled a radical re-think of the law, culture, economics, and the whole mores of society. Even though he is writing of the origins of the novel in previous centuries, the work of Benedict Anderson suggests that the newness of the state offers novelists a great chance to influence what that state becomes. His *Imagined Communities* explains the novel form as developing historically alongside the emergence of the

⁴⁵ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence* (London:Chatto and Windus, 1970), 11.

⁴⁶ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, 155.

nation state.⁴⁷ He argues the novel provides the means through which individuals in these nations can imagine themselves as integral parts of a newly-conceived united community, free now from former regional or other divisions. The novel, Anderson contends, "provided the technical means for re-presenting the kind of imagined community that is the nation."⁴⁸ The imagined nation, just like the novel's individual, moves in chronological time from dispute and conflict towards a desired resolution. The imagined nation mirrors the society created by the novelist and the imagined nation will develop individuated roles as will the novel. The development of this vision of unity requires a standardised national language through which the unity can be communicated, an effective print industry to distribute the message and a literate population to read and absorb it.

"Where shall we turn if we want to know something about Ireland?" asked Sidney Webb in 1916. He answered his own rhetorical question: "we must go to the fiction, and, be it added, learn how to use fiction, like an exquisite fossil in road material, for a purpose other than that for which it was invented."⁴⁹ Webb, in arguing for the scientific and sociological use of the vast amount of observation and

⁴⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

⁴⁹ Sidney Webb, 'Ireland in Fiction: The Scientific and Sociological Value of Novels, 1919', reproduced in *Sociological Origins*, Vol 5, No.1 (Fall 2006), 22.

criticism buried in novels, commended the annotated catalogue of novels about Ireland, produced that year by Stephen J. Brown⁵⁰:

Father Brown gives us quite impartially, good novels and bad, Protestant libels on the Catholic Church and Catholic abuse of Protestant social life, historical novels extending over more than twenty centuries, novels seditious and revolutionary and novels “High Tory” and Imperialist, sentimental novels, humorous novels, comic novels, novels of adventure and novels of mysticism, novels about Ulster and novels about Cork, novels about Dublin society and Vice-regal functions and novels about Arran and Achil [sic.] and the Wicklow Mountains. It seems that every part of Ireland, every period of Irish history, every stratum of Irish Society, every industry or occupation of the people who live in Ireland, every phase of their character and every contour and shade of color of the scenery amid which they live, must be represented in the couple of thousand novels thus analyzed and annotated.⁵¹

The list could hardly be more comprehensive, and seems proof positive that the novel-writing and, presumably, the novel-reading traditions were vigorous – with ‘good novels and bad’ – as the struggle for independence began its final stage.

Father Brown’s listing included the works of the Irish Literary Renaissance, which, by 1916, had lost much of its creative energy. The Literary Revival – perhaps more appropriately referred to as the Celtic Revival – flourished in the decades at the turn of the twentieth century. Some consideration of the movement is necessary because attitudes formed and actions taken during these years created the context for the politics, the society and the literature of the newly-independent state in 1922.

⁵⁰ See Stephen J. Brown, *Ireland in Fiction; A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folklore* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1916).

⁵¹ Webb, ‘Ireland in Fiction’, 22.

The Revivalist writers set the agenda for those who followed. The ideas and motives the two generations shared, as well as the crucial ways they differed, can help explain the size of the task and the nature of the response. The Literary Revival is remembered now mainly for works which regularly depicted an idealised and romanticised – and therefore inauthentic – peasant way of life. The writers were concerned to rebut English stereotypes of the Irish as ignorant and brutish. However, they were also anxious to oppose what they saw as the coming crisis for their civilisation – a modernity that embraced commercialism, industrialisation and urbanisation. Consequently, in promoting ancient values as embodied in their depiction of the traditional Irish way of life the peasant became a ‘cleaned-up’ version of the English stereotype, no longer ignorant, merely uneducated, not brutish but unsophisticated.

The problem for Yeats’ Irish Literary Society, and the Irish Literary theatre it spawned, was that there was no body of distinctive Irish writing that had the quality of literature, and was available to a wide audience. There existed a literature in Irish, both ancient legends in manuscripts, and folk legends and poetry, some of which survived only in an oral tradition. Whilst antiquarians had provided translations, few reached a quality that made their spirit and tone accessible. Filling this gap gave impetus to a generation of writers, and the shared purpose gave cohesion to their work. It was Yeats who gave direction to the new movement by his challenge:

Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language? Can we not keep the continuity of the nation's life...by translating or retelling in English, which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style, all that is best of the ancient literature?⁵²

The lead he gave was to research Gaelic legend and mythology, and fairy and folk tales to create imaginative poetry and prose that was quality art.

However, a limited focus on the Revival's portrayals of a venerable and fanciful Ireland detracts from an appreciation of the range and volume of the literary work produced during these years. Indeed, Emer Nolan claims, "In no other period has Ireland produced so many writers of such extraordinary quality". Besides Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory, she cites George Russell and George Moore. Other writers she could have mentioned would include Edward Martyn, John Eglinton, Somerville and Ross and James Stephens. Nolan also discusses James Joyce because his, and Samuel Beckett's, reputations and achievements "are at least in part moulded by their rejection of the aesthetics and politics of the revival."⁵³ Accepting that Joyce was not integral to the revival canon, critics have tended to see the novel as the movement's least successful genre. John Kenny has pointed out that, even in 1916, "Ernest Boyd passed on what came to be the received wisdom about the novel

⁵² W.B. Yeats, from a letter to the *United Ireland* quoted in A. N. Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), 92.

⁵³ Emer Nolan, 'Modernism and the Irish Revival', in Joe Cleary and Clare Connolly (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 157.

at that time; dedicating only a last short chapter to 'Fiction and Narrative Prose', which he called 'the weak point of the Revival.'⁵⁴

The natural focus on novelists with international reputations such as Joyce, and less-assuredly Moore, can obscure the fact that – as Stephen Brown had enumerated – the turn-of-the-century novel was an active market. Between 1890 and 1910 notable novels were written by Emily Lawless, Abraham Stoker, Canon Sheehan, Oscar Wilde, Shan Bullock, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, Katharine Tynan, George Birmingham and Forrest Reid. Their reputations as novelists have not competed with Joyce, nor has the genre overcome the prejudice that the novel of the Revival period was indeed no more than mediocre. This end-of-century literary outpouring was a part of a much wider innovative imperative. As John Wilson Foster points out:

The Irish Cultural Revival, in its breadth, and going far beyond Yeats's own ideas, was a vast educational project that indeed included the classroom but also extramural instruction, from agriculture through art, clothing, language, law and leisure to sports. A distinctive Gaelic culture was to be revived and adapted to the modern world, and reform was to be so deep and widespread as to constitute cultural revolution.⁵⁵

Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh recalled the atmosphere of those days:

This was 1900. In Dublin these were the great days of the Gaelic League, of innumerable little clubs and societies, of diverse mo[ve]ments aimed at the

⁵⁴ John Kenny, "'No such genre': Tradition and the Contemporary Irish Novel', in P.J. Mathews (ed.) *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (Dublin:Four Courts Press, 2000), 45.

⁵⁵ John Wilson Foster, *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12.

establishment of a new national order. Dublin bristled with little national movements of every conceivable kind: cultural, literary, theatrical, political.⁵⁶

People so intellectually alive would have provided a reading public for the thousands of novels that Stephen Brown was to list in 1916. The War of Independence, and the Civil War that followed, would not have destroyed that public, so it would be reasonable to assume that when the Free State was established in 1922 a considerable and expectant audience existed for the new generation of novelists.

Critics and the reading public, however, have tended to take for granted that the decades after independence were a period of decline and mediocrity for literature in general – with the exception of Beckett – and were worse for the novel. Kenny writes that the novel was disparaged by critics in both the Revival and the post-independent decades: “Excepting Joyce and a few other isolated instances, the first five decades of this century have long been regarded as stagnant as far as the novel is concerned.”⁵⁷ Possibly inflated and nostalgic interpretations of the achievements of the Literary Renaissance cast a shadow over the years that followed. Certainly, the literary criticism of O’Faoláin, O’Connor and others who linked their criticisms inexorably to a critique of contemporary political and social life reinforced negative interpretations of the period. Cumulatively such criticism created a

⁵⁶ Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, quoted in George O’Brien, ‘In Search of an Audience: Notes on the Progress of Irish Literature, 1891-1941’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 11 Special Number (1981), 117.

⁵⁷ Kenny, ‘No such Genre’, 48.

widespread, if simplistic, perception that little of value could have flourished during the years dominated by the ideology of Éamon de Valera.

If the Revival era cast a lasting shadow, the era that followed 1922-1960s has also ensured that the shade was not lifted. The 1960s was a period of considerable political and cultural change in Ireland and in other countries worldwide. Many cultural certainties and traditions were challenged, largely peaceably, but also more violently. In Ireland it was seen as a change of perspective from de Valera's alleged isolationist policies to Sean Lemass's more expansive attitude to economics and politics. Kenny concurs: "The late fifties and the sixties was the period, or at least has been subsequently perceived as the period, when Ireland's post-colonial baggage was left behind in the wash of a rising tide of social and economic developments."⁵⁸ This new self-confidence demonstrated by the state has been seen as the time when Irish society was shown to be mature, and, in the terms of Henry James, O'Faoláin, Kiberd and others, able to sustain novels of literary quality. Kilroy, writing in 1982, considers that these changes actively encouraged literature:

If Irish writing over the past quarter of a century has demonstrated a new confidence, including an intellectual one, then it is also true that Irish society has responded to it in an expansive fashion. It would appear that a social milieu has developed in this country which has sought art as something to be

⁵⁸ John Kenny, 'After the News. Critiquing the Irish Novel since the Sixties', *Irish Review*, No.25 (Winter 1999-Spring 2000), 64.

cultivated, to be acquired, without which society would be seen to be impoverished.⁵⁹

Kilroy's argument reinforces the image that prior to the sixties there was not a society that valued art. Augustine Martin argued that the image of the dissenting author raging at the society he encountered, from Moore and Joyce to O'Faoláin and O'Connor, was not the only image. He suggested that Kate O'Brien and Francis MacManus both "reflected a calm contemplative relationship with their material." However, he rather destroys the case he is making by a most bleak, and memorable, description of the common view of pre-1960 Ireland that he hopes to undermine:

It has become firmly established in the majority of literate minds that Ireland is a backward, insanitary, inert, despairing country; a people priest-ridden and superstitious, which despises its artists and its intellectuals, treats its autocratic, avaricious and crafty clergy with a sanctimonious servility; a people soaked in dreams and booze, fixated backwards on the events of Easter Week, 1916, blind to the meaning of the present and the future, without economic hope, helpless in the face of emigration, ignorant of the facts of life, overcome with a Jansenistic fear of sex and the body, bemused with the opium of past splendours – yet in spite of all, a people friendly, poetic, with a certain gentle unreliable charm.⁶⁰

Joyce and O'Faoláin could hardly have penned a more graphic critique. His summation is that "whatever the social contemporary veracity" of the portrayals, he does not consider them true of the last ten years, but, therefore, accepts the possibility that they were true of the 1920-1950s.

⁵⁹ Thomas Kilroy, 'The Irish Writer: Self and Society, 1950-1980', in Peter Connolly (ed.), *Literature and the Changing Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), 177.

⁶⁰ Augustine Martin, 'Inherited Dissent; The Dilemma of the Irish Writer', *Studies* (Spring, 1965), 8, 10.

Martin argued that, whatever the reality of the past, the situation of 1965 was different and writers should reflect that difference instead of reinforcing the negatives. It was in the commercial and egotistical interests of the 1960s generation of writers to disparage the novels of their immediate predecessors and to deny any continuity in the novel genre. In the spirit of the age their products had to be seen as revolutionary, so the dismissal of the novels of the first four decades of independence enabled them to disassociate their product completely from that of their 'failed' predecessors, while implying theirs was a completely innovative Irish fiction. The dearth of critical studies of the period seems to have left the simplicity of the negative overview relatively unchallenged. Frank Shovlin, however, reasons "it is wrong to dismiss those middle decades of the Irish twentieth century as some sort of artistic dark age"⁶¹ and proves his point in his depiction of the creative energies revealed in the pages of the literary periodicals of the period. Welch supports a positive reappraisal of the decades:

It would be superficial (and simply wrong) to imagine, as has sometimes been the case, that the post-revolutionary period was one in which the Irish book went into decline. On the contrary from a literary point of view, the years from the end of the Civil War in 1923 to the 1960s were years in which there was no diminution in the flow of work that attained quite remarkable standards of excellence: these were the years of Frank O'Connor, Seán O'Faoláin, Samuel Beckett, Flann O'Brien, Louis MacNeice, Patrick Kavanagh, Joyce Cary, Elizabeth Bowen, Mairtin O Cadhain, and Seán Ó Ríordáin.⁶²

⁶¹ Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923-1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 3.

⁶² Robert Welch, 'Preface', in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Irish Book in English 1891-2000, Volume V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vi-vii.

Welch immediately weakens his own argument by pointing out that the majority of these writers neither lived nor published in Ireland. Also clear is that only two, Cary and Bowen, wrote successful realist novels, of which only Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) and *A World of Love* (1955) had an Irish setting.

For the realist novel genre a significant problem is the lack of a critically-accepted minor canon of Irish literature. John Banville, in a 1993 television interview, argued that in Irish literature: "We don't really have minor writers; we just either have completely third or fourth rate writers or we have great ones. We have these big figures standing behind us that frighten the living daylights out of us."⁶³ As a novelist himself, he had in mind the monster figures of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Even as a successful and acclaimed novelist, he willingly, though doubtless tongue-in-cheek, restated an old literary inferiority complex. Banville as a novelist and literary editor was well aware of his many contemporaries that would qualify as significant writers, but minor as compared to those he regards as 'colossi'.⁶⁴ Irish critics seem so overawed by the colossi that they cannot see the value in lesser writers. It is not lesser writers that "we don't really have", but an *appreciation* of a canon of lesser fiction. The novels of Liam O'Flaherty, for example, or Kate O'Brien, John McGahern and John Banville himself can be evaluated as novels with their own

⁶³ Quoted in John Kenny, *John Banville* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 47.

⁶⁴ John Banville, *Sunday Times* (29.03.1993), 9.

qualities without being condemned out-of-hand for not being masterpieces of the major canon.

O'Faolain, in his *The Dilemma of Irish Letters*, had made a similar point in 1949: "And while one does not expect a literature to be composed of writers of the first order one does expect it to include a few large figures. Today we have nobody in Ireland of the stature of Joyce, Moore, Synge or Yeats."⁶⁵ While appreciating O'Faoláin's sentiment, his statement about Irish literature is not factual, as Samuel Beckett was already becoming internationally acclaimed, though living abroad. At the time of his writing there were several short story writers, himself included, who would be seen as large figures in their field, and internationally known. Amongst novelists, it would depend on the subjective definition of 'large', but several of his contemporaries, Kate O'Brien, Liam O'Flaherty, Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane and Mary Lavin, for example, were judged large enough by the market to still be in print seventy years later. O'Faoláin, a professional journalist as well as critic, was always prone to a little exaggeration to enliven his copy and accepts the 'all-or-nothing' categorisation; for him there is only the major canon of writing, and the 'colossi' overshadow all the rest. Benedict Kiely, surveying the same field as O'Faoláin and at the same time, took an optimistic view in his *Modern Irish Fiction* of 1950. To Kiely, the first decades of independence had provided a stability that made Ireland 'open country' for the novelist such that the novels had then opened "a wide window into

⁶⁵ O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', 367.

the soul of the people of this island.”⁶⁶ Kiely could enjoy the novels for what they were, rather than Sean O’Faoláin’s criticism of what they were not.

1922 marked a new political beginning, but much of life, including literature, continued as before. National independence did see some new writers – O’Flaherty, O’Faoláin and O’Connor would be examples – who had committed to the struggle, and now wanted to make a living narrating the origins and influencing the development of the Free State. However, as novelists they were joining an established tradition. There were some novelists successful before the independence struggles began, and who were writing during those years, and continued after the establishment of the state. The older generation included Katherine Tynan, Somerville and Ross and Forrest Reid. The younger generation included Jeremiah O’Donovan, Annie Smithson, Seumas O’Kelly, Daniel Corkery, James Stephens, Brinsley MacNamara and Eimar O’Duffy. To this considerable list of realist novelists active at the time of the founding of the state must be added those who published their first novels in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to O’Faoláin, O’Connor and O’Flaherty are Peadar O’Donnell, Kate O’Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Pamela Hinkson, Francis Stuart, Molly Keane, Kathleen Coyle, Michael McLaverty and Francis MacManus. In a nation with Ireland’s small population, such a considerable listing reflects an active novel writing and reading market. If the critics are correct and none of this output was of high literary merit, it would suggest that there might indeed be

⁶⁶Benedict Kiely, *Modern Irish Fiction: A Critique* (Dublin: Golden Eagle, 1950), vi.

a reason why the genre always failed. The number of novels produced even in the first two decades of independence provides sufficient material for consideration.

The post-independence writers shared with Yeats's generation the desire to narrate an independent Ireland. But the situation in which both groups operated was now radically different. Yeats's group were seeking to create a culture and society that could narrate an Ireland that deserved its independence. Post-1922 writers had that independence, but found that the culture and society was illusory, and they had to influence the creation of a real society. Crucially, the optimism of the Revival had been destroyed by the circumstances of independence. The blood-losses of the Great War, the trauma of the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence had taken its toll even before the savagery of the Civil War. O'Faoláin and others acknowledged the literary legacy of the Revival, while also being aware that the problems, and therefore the solutions, for both sets of writers were very different. In his 'Yeats and the Younger Generation', he emphasises that those of his own generation "were faced with problems far more insistent: social, political and even religious problems. They had grown up in a period of revolution, were knitted with common life, and could not evade its appeal. As time went on these problems became savagely acute".⁶⁷

The differences between the Revivalist writers and those fresh on the scene in the 1910s and 1920s were stark. The Revivalists, especially the most prominent, were

⁶⁷Seán O'Faoláin, 'Yeats and the Younger Generation', *Horizon*, Vol. 5, No. 25 (January 1942), 50.

largely from the Protestant Ascendancy and therefore of minor aristocratic or upper-middle class backgrounds, with an education and tastes that reflected their upbringings. Their preferred forms of literature were principally poetry and drama. The focus of their work was an idealised rural life, often of the West, seen as idyllic and traditional in opposition to the baseness of the modernity of industry and the city. Their characters were the extremes of Big House aristocracy or the romanticised peasantry, whose language was an artificial creation which prominent Revivalists, especially Hyde and Lady Gregory, contrived as a distinctive speech style that they took to be accurate in form, and to contain the sub-text of the old Gaelic culture. The independence they sought usually involved maintaining the connection with Britain through devolution of a limited Home Rule. The new generation were more often Catholics from working and middle class backgrounds, whose characters still included the landed classes and the landless peasant, both now seen with more critical awareness, but present now were also the uprooted people of town and city. These authors' chosen mode of narration was to be realistic fiction, in both novel and short story form.

However, the realist novel genre they now needed was not held in high critical esteem. Kenny relates that in 1912 the novelist Shan Bullock concluded a lecture to the Irish Literary Society with his comments on the contemporary novel, concluding that it was "not worthy of the country and its people." Kenny continues, "Bullock's complaint was that while other nationalities were successfully voicing

themselves in fiction, this country was being 'voiced only by politicians and a school of dramatists which often distorts'."⁶⁸ The assumption clearly was that the realist novel was not voicing the nation. The major task was to generate, or re-generate, a tradition of realistic novels fit for the purpose of narrating a new and developing nation. They also had to recapture a novel-reading audience for the realist mode of novel. Alongside a 'distorting' drama, both Shan Bullock and Ernest Boyd had observed, and regretted, that the realist novel was being usurped by the non-realism of the fantasy novel. The fantasy novel, and the experimental novel, were in fact to play a very significant role in the post-independence decades. Indeed the novelists who achieved greatest critical acclaim – Joyce and Beckett internationally, Flann O'Brien domestically and belatedly – all wrote experimental or fantastical novels. Such novels do not need a stable or stratified society to succeed, for their success requires only that they create the fictive illusion of a world that, even if unrecognisable or fantastical, is plausible. James M. Cahalan chronicles: "During the period 1920-1955 all Irish novelists reacted to the frequently reactionary, puritanical tendencies of Irish society; the realists chose to thoroughly expose these tendencies and the fabulist to escape and lampoon them."⁶⁹ The acknowledged success of the experimental and fantasy novels, in which the reality of the society could be escaped,

⁶⁸ Shan Bullock, quoted in Kenny, 'No such Genre', 45, 47.

⁶⁹ James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 180.

is a pointer that possibly the realist novel could not prosper in the society that existed in the Ireland of the post-independence decades.

Controversy arose when Seán O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor – later supported by other Irish critics and novelists – evaluated the contemporary novel in the Ireland of the first decades of Irish independence and found it wanting. Looking retrospectively for some rational explanation, they proposed that the cause lay in the nature of Irish society, which they conceived as definitely not 'normal'. Ireland was depicted, for example, by John McGahern as "often bigoted, cowardly, philistine and spiritually crippled"⁷⁰ and by Dermot Bolger as being marked by "inward-looking stagnation."⁷¹ Having rationalised that Ireland's perceived society was the cause of the novel's failure, O'Faoláin proceeded to conjecture why the Irish short story was both a literary and a commercial success. He concluded that that same society that was famishing the novel must be nourishing the short story, which must thrive because the society was, as he believed, so fragmented. The O'Faoláin/O'Connor proposition stands or falls both on the validity of their delineation of Irish society as unstructured, fragmented and different in kind to other societies where the novel does prosper, and also that the novels produced were indeed failures. The coming five chapters will seek to look carefully at both Irish society of the period and the fiction it spawned in order to put the Cork writers' theories to the test.

⁷⁰ McGahern, in Tóibín, *Bad Blood*, 79.

⁷¹ Dermot Bolger, 'Introduction', in Dermot Bolger (ed.), *The Picador Book of Irish Contemporary Fiction* (London: Picador, 1993), viii.

Chapter One:

The Official State; or the Ireland “we would have”

What must be held fast to, what I can't repeat too often, is the fact that what isn't written from experience is worthless. You must never write about what you don't know. Not to use the unique material which you have in your possession is a kind of suicide.¹

John Braine

For the Irish realist novelists, the Ireland of the post-independence decades provided first-hand experiences. Ireland also provided a community whose shared attitudes and values coloured the writers' individual ways of interpreting experience and thus creating unique material. These real events and their impact on society provided the themes and context for their work. It also created the practical conditions in which the professional writer had to operate. Karl Marx argued, “men make their own history but not in circumstances of their own choosing”, referring to the fact that all of us are to some degree the product of a particular history and set of circumstances, and to the ways our possible actions are constrained by society.²

Literary critics argue that for realist novels to succeed they require “a made society”³ and “a degree of social stability and continuity.”⁴ Colm Tóibín argues that

¹ John Braine, *Writing a Novel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 40.

² John Harriss (ed.), *The Family. A Social History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8.

³ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), 556.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2005), 281.

Ireland at independence was "a country where history wiped out any hope of us forming a cohesive, safe, secure, well-adjusted, class-ridden society." He sees instead "something broken and insecure" leading him to ask: "How can the novel flourish in such a world? The novel explores psychology, sociology, the individual consciousness; the novel finds a form and a language for these explorations. We require an accepted world for the novel to flourish, a shared sense of time and place."⁵ Tóibín is asserting that the Ireland of 1922-1960s was both "broken and insecure" and different in character from other countries where the novel could, and did, flourish.

The official character of the Irish State is defined in its legislation and in its Constitution. Inevitably, the society that actually evolved was quite different to the society that the legislation had intended should evolve. The slippage between the ideal and the real provides a tension that was to be explored by fiction writers. Post-1960, it became the consensus view – as with Tóibín – to characterise the first four decades of independent Ireland as years of insular and backward-looking politics, of economic poverty and hardship, and of a dominant national mindset that was not only conservative, but intolerant and anti-intellectual. Opponents of the State perpetuated this negative image. Bew and Patterson argue, "Unionism was built round the contrast between bustling progressive industrial Ulster and 'backward',

⁵ Colm Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', in Dermot Bolger (ed.), *Letters from the New Island* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1991), 45.

‘stagnant’ peasant southern Ireland.”⁶ Internal commentators also assert this view. John McGahern describes the period as “a very dark time indeed, in which an insular church colluded with an insecure State to bring about a society that was often bigoted, intolerant, cowardly, philistine, and spiritually crippled”.⁷ The 1960s are seen as the watershed, bringing enlightenment to the gloom. Basil Chubb, for example, argues that, “The sixties, however, saw the beginnings of considerable changes in the culture of the Irish. The Republic gradually becomes a less clerically-dominated, more secular and liberal society.”⁸

Time has enabled the sweeping judgements to be re-examined to provide a more nuanced evaluation that reveals a constantly developing and complex society, for Ireland’s culture was never monolithic. University College Cork’s *Multitext Project* suggests, “A closer and more sympathetic study reveals remarkable variety in beliefs and attitudes, a high degree of literary and artistic vitality, and a much more “European” view of culture and contemporary events than it has been customary to believe.”⁹ Across the forty years, changing political and economic circumstances demanded and elicited changing responses. The world, and Ireland, of 1922 was very different from the world, and Ireland, of 1962. The State had a difficult birth.

⁶ Paul Bew and Henry Patterson, *The British State and the Ulster Crisis* (London: Verso, 1985) 3.

⁷ Quoted in Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk along the Irish Border* (London: Picador, 2001), 79.

⁸ Basil Chubb, *The Constitution and Constitutional Change in Ireland* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), 96.

⁹ University College Cork, ‘Ireland: Culture and Religion, 1912-1949’, *Multitext Project in Irish History* at http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Ireland_culture_religion_1912-49_ Accessed on 22.01.2014.

Independence had been gained after an armed struggle with a long-entrenched occupier, and was greeted by a bloodier internal war between former fellow-revolutionaries. Yet such extreme difficulties did not mean chaos. From the start there were widely-accepted common goals for the immediate and the longer term. Immediately, the new state needed to survive. The insurgency had to be overcome and stability established. In the longer term, the assertion of independence required an emphasis on a distinctively Irish culture and on developing an economy no longer dependent on Britain. Rouane and Todd summarise the intentions of the new leaders:

The project had a decolonising and a modernising aspect. The decolonising strand sought to dismantle the British legacy in Ireland and to build a new and authentically Irish state and society; the modernising strand sought to develop Ireland as a modern society fully in line with contemporary Western European norms.¹⁰

Concentration on the sole object of removing the common enemy had disguised the complexities of the coalition of the nationalist activists. With the War of Independence ending with a Treaty which established both a partitioned Ireland and retained links to the English crown, the coalition sundered into those willing to compromise – if reluctantly and as a time-limited measure – and the irreconcilable absolutists to whom partition and lingering allegiance to Britain was anathema. The civil war that ensued was particularly violent and marked by assassinations and executions of former comrades-in-arms. The provisional government decided the

¹⁰ Joseph Rouane and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 232.

situation demanded harsh deterrent measures and executed in total seventy-eight Republican prisoners, whereas during the longer period of the War of Independence the British had executed only twenty-four Republican prisoners. The defeat of the anti-Treaty forces in spring 1923 did not end the anti-Treatyites' ambitions for a united Ireland, which led to dissident members of the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) continuing to perpetrate armed actions including the intimidation and murder of witnesses. Intimidation also ensured that trial by jury of insurgents had all but failed.¹¹ The government responded firmly with emergency anti-subversion legislation. Whether this emergency legislation was necessary or not, it is evidence that post-independence and post-Civil War Irish society was destabilised by a number of armed dissident groupings determined to get their way by violent and oppressive means.

Rather than suggesting that Irish society was too thin to provide novelistic material, be it characters, settings or plots, the complexities argue the opposite. These traumatic times did inadvertently assist the fiction writers. John Kelleher points out that, "for forty years the Irish artist very seldom had to think of what to write about. He only had to reach out and take all he could from the common stock."¹² Indeed, Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (1925)¹³ has been taken "(fairly or

¹¹ Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: The Irish Free State and its Enemies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79; and Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its Senate* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 255-261.

¹² John Kelleher, 'Irish Literature Today', in Charles Fanning (ed.), *Selected Writings of John V. Kelleher on Ireland and America* (Carnegie: South Carolina University, 2002), 87.

unfairly) as a nearly documentary record of the terrorist underworld in Dublin in the mid-1920s.”¹⁴ Whilst that is a compliment to O’Flaherty’s skill as a realistic novelist creating a story, setting and characters that are credible, he was creating a novel, not recording history. O’Flaherty wrote a psychological thriller that explored the clashes between brute force and intellect, and between instinct and reason, and which satirizes blind devotion to causes. He observes and records creatively, and presents his novelist’s interpretation. The novel has a clear and compact structure, and a tight time-frame, exactly twelve hours. The plot is linear: Gypo Nolan, an exaggerated brute of a man, meets and then informs on his close friend Frankie McPhillip for the twenty pound reward. The novel follows him in a series of staged, visually-vivid settings around Dublin before being tried and sentenced to death after an inquiry by Commandant Dan Gallagher. Gypo escapes but is in turn informed on by Katie Fox his occasional female partner, and dies, melodramatically, in a church where he has sought and received forgiveness from Frankie’s mother.

The Informer is not specifically about the republican subversives just defeated in the Civil War. O’Flaherty’s theme is the nature of all such secret organisations, the leaders and the led, and so characterisation is limited to the symbolic representatives of both. Gypo, the foot-soldier innured to violence, displays his brutality in his superhuman strength in fighting a huge policemen, and in fighting

¹³ Liam O’Flaherty, *The Informer* (1925) (London: New English Library, 1980).

¹⁴ John Hildebidle, *Five Irish Writers. The Errand of Keeping Alive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) : 32

off up to ten revolutionaries at a time, and his sub-human stupidity in the act of informing, in the flaunting of the money, and the ludicrous lies he cannot remember. Commander Gallagher represents his opposite, the handsome and charismatic leader, who presents as unemotional and intelligent. However, the plot reveals him as cruel and sadistic, externally controlled and confident, but, under pressure, unsure and cowardly. He presents as driven by personal power, an ideologue utterly devoid of ideals. Gypo was made flawed; Gallagher has made himself flawed. Compared to the calculating hypocritical Gallagher, the pathetic Gypo merits some sympathy.

The novel brilliantly depicts both the exterior setting of Dublin's mean slums and its desperate people, and the interior setting inside Gypo's dull-witted mind where thought never precedes action. The action is starkly dramatic. Characters, plot, the storyline of the pre-trial ramble round the streets and brothel, the trial, the escape and the chase, and the conclusion are exuberantly exaggerated. This illustrates the atmosphere within this out-of-control city and state. The ever-present fear of violence by police, subversives and street thugs have become the way-of-life, and, in consequence, life is precarious and cheap. O'Flaherty convincingly presents a critique of unthinking commitment to any cause or ideology, and the damage that that does to the humanity of its adherents. Richard Fallis claims that *The Informer* is "one of the most powerful novels of its time and one that comes very close indeed to the naturalistic ideal of exacting depiction of relentless external forces." He further

suggests that “for all of its obvious flaws”, which he saw as the melodrama and the unnecessary romantic sub-plot of Gallagher and Mary McPhillip, *The Informer* is “something close to a great novel.”¹⁵

Historian John Regan concludes that Cosgrave and his Government painted an exaggerated picture of the anti-State revolutionaries depicted by O’Flaherty in order to justify their draconian legislation.¹⁶ The Constitution (Amendment No. 17) Act (1931) incorporated a Public Safety Act which abrogated essential personal protections provided by the 1922 Constitution by giving the Executive Council of the Irish Free State powers of arrest, detention and trial before military tribunals where the normal rules of evidence did not apply. There was no appeal and no restriction on possible sentences, including the death penalty. That firm action was necessary had been apparent from July 1927 when Kevin O’Higgins, the Minister for Justice, and possibly the ablest member of the Council, was assassinated on his way to mass in Dublin. Liam O’Flaherty presented his interpretation of the event in *The Assassin* (1928)¹⁷, though in a letter to his mentor Edward Garnett he rather disingenuously seemed to deny it: “The only danger is that it might bear too close a resemblance to the O’Higgins business.”¹⁸ The resemblance is remarkably close, as three assassins

¹⁵ Richard Fallis, *The Irish Renaissance. An Introduction to Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1978), 207-208.

¹⁶ John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1999), 290.

¹⁷ Liam O’Flaherty, *The Assassin* (1928) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1983).

¹⁸ Liam O’Flaherty, quoted in A.A.Kelly.(ed.), *The Letters of Liam O’Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996), 195.

shoot an important government minister as he walks to Church, continuing to shoot him while lying helpless, and then escape by car, never to be captured. O'Flaherty uses the opportunity to create, not a fast-moving thriller, but a slow-moving psychological study of the ideologues leading subversive organisations.

O'Flaherty's purpose is to satirize the rhetoric of the nationalist leader who proclaims himself as a martyr to the cause, the glorification of the blood sacrifice. Michael McDara is a development of Dan Gallagher of *The Informer*. Gallagher has no ideals, while McDara has too many. McDara, whose biography is very close to O'Flaherty's own presentation of himself in *Shame the Devil*¹⁹ is no heroic man-of-action. The achievement of independence and the settlement of the Civil War has robbed him and his ilk of their reason for being. The story-line is simple; the assassination group comes together, they assassinate and they escape. The strength of the novel is the satirizing of nationalist rhetoric, suggesting how mystical dreams can inspire deluded followers to act outrageously. The weakness is that the action is insufficient to carry the burden of so much "sententious philosophizing".²⁰ O'Flaherty himself seems to have thought so too. In a letter thanking Edward Garnett for his criticism, he suggests, "The assassin was wrong in the first place and in the second place I was trying, for the market, to write seventy thousand words about a story that should only run to about forty thousand words. That was the

¹⁹ Liam O'Flaherty, *Shame the Devil* (1934) ((Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1981).

²⁰ Patrick F. Sheeran. *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976), 292

cause of the disaster.”²¹ The narrative style is rigidly demarcated between the long rambling sentences of the inner musings, to the short staccato sentences of the factual descriptions. Some images seem self-indulgent rather than relevant, for example the little man crawling through the crowd to put his hands into the victim’s blood and cackling as he smears the wall.²² In this early novel of O’Flaherty’s, the exaggerations and the excess, which in later novels work successfully, diminish its impact.

De Valera's condemnation of the assassins – likely to have been former associates – reflected the new state's political maturity. Whilst the members of the provisional government were experienced nationalist politicians as well as victorious revolutionaries, none had direct experience of the practicalities of day-to-day government. Yet the 1920s provide evidence of sophisticated political leadership and vision. The political achievements of that first decade of independence, especially the establishment of stability and democracy internally, and international acceptance as a sovereign state, are now widely acknowledged. Recognition is due to the sophisticated political acumen of the early leaders. Garvin argues:

The unusual ability of the post-independence politicians and party activists to build large and coherent cross-class political parties was crucial to the development of an ordered political politics after 1922; it was possibly the

²¹ Liam O’Flaherty, quoted in Kelly (ed.), *The Letters*, 203.

²² O’Flaherty, *The Assassin*, 215-216.

main reason why democratic politics in Ireland did not, as happened in so many states, disintegrate into instability and confusion.”²³

Within a decade, the professionalism of the civil service, army and police, and the commitment to constitutionalism by the political leaders created a stable and democratic state. The Cumann na nGaedheal government led by William Cosgrave moved from the civil war conditions of an armed insurgency in 1922 to being willing to hand power over to the leaders of that very insurgency following the Fianna Fáil victory in the election of 1932. The stability established by the first government of independent Ireland stands in sharp contrast to the unrest and disquiet of the preceding British-dominated decades.

Parallel to gaining acceptance internally, the first Free State governments achieved remarkable success in gaining international recognition of Irish sovereignty. The actions of the Cumann na nGaedheal government in international politics suggests their aim was to be accepted as separate, not isolate. Ireland’s status as an independent state was unclear under the Treaty. This entailed the acceptance of a British-appointed governor-general as legal representative of the British king who remained the titular head of state, and a requirement that the elected members of the parliament take an oath of allegiance to the Crown. This was clearly a restricted independence. As Gerard Hogan points out:

the British side certainly considered these to be real restraints which squarely confined the Irish Free State within the existing parameters of prevailing Imperial/Commonwealth constitutional theory. There seems to

²³ Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1983), 2.

have been no realisation on the part of the British side that the Irish Free State would successfully challenge and push back these boundaries over the next fifteen years.²⁴

Full independence was compromised by the British military occupation of garrisons at the ports of Cobh, Berehaven and Lough Swilly, and the fuel storage facilities at Rathmullen and Haulbowline.

Cosgrave's government worked at decolonisation by generating changes of dominion status at the Commonwealth conferences of 1926 and 1930. Working with Canada and South Africa, the Irish Free State played a key role in converting the British Empire into a Commonwealth of sovereign nations. Kevin O'Higgins' role was crucial at the Imperial Conference of 1926 at which the co-equality of the dominions with Great Britain was established. Ireland was influential in achieving the Statute of Westminster in 1931 at which the legislative authority of Westminster over the dominions was effectively abolished. Despite Treaty constraints, the Free State government consistently asserted its independence. In September 1923 the Irish Free State joined the League of Nations as a fully sovereign state. Much to Britain's annoyance, they registered the Anglo-Irish Treaty with the Treaty Registration Bureau of the League of Nations as an agreement between two nations. Ireland was the first dominion to establish a permanent delegation at the League of Nations at

²⁴Gerard Hogan, *The Origins of the Irish Constitution. 1928-1941* (Dublin: The Royal Irish Academy, 2012),1.

Geneva.²⁵ From April 1924, the Irish Free State issued its own passports rather than continuing to use British passports. Again the Irish Free State was the first dominion country to establish diplomatic missions abroad: Washington in 1924, and in 1929, Paris and Berlin. In 1929, demonstrating its independence from the Commonwealth, the Irish Free State signed the optional clause of the Permanent Court of International Justice, which obliged it to refer any international dispute to the jurisdiction of the Court. The other Commonwealth countries including Britain had refused to do so. In 1931 the Irish Free State became the first dominion to apply its own seal on a treaty, the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation concluded with Portugal.²⁶

The Fianna Fáil government led by Eamon De Valera continued the general agenda of decolonization and modernization, but with radically different policies that were bold, contentious and successful. Within six years the legal ties with the former colonizer were changed utterly. Crucially, in 1933 the government abandoned the taking of the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown and the appealing of Irish Supreme Court judgements to the London Privy Council. The crisis created by the abdication of Edward VIII in 1936 required confirmation by each dominion's legislature. De Valera took the opportunity this presented. The government first diminished the powers of the governor-general, and then abolished the role entirely.

²⁵ David Harkness, *Restless Dominion. The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations. 1921-1931* (London: MacMillan, 1969), 57.

²⁶ Harkness, *Restless Dominion*, 230.

Symbolically inter-government dealings with England and the Commonwealth states were moved to the Foreign Ministry. In 1937 a new constitution was negotiated within Ireland with no consultation with the British government. One important purpose of the new Constitution was to make clear the rejection of any references to the British Empire lingering from the 1922 constitution, and to confirm the legislative changes enacted since.²⁷ The Free State's proactive foreign policy was largely ignored by its internal critics. Joe Cleary points out that "Those such as Seán O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor who complained most bitterly about the miseries of Irish provincialism wrote little enough of any distinction – beyond literary criticism – on the wider world of international affairs."²⁸ Cleary also notes that "the major Irish fiction of the mid-century period is resolutely introspective in focus despite its critique of Irish introspection."²⁹ Ironically, O'Faoláin owed his Harvard education to a Commonwealth Scholarship.

While working to assert its sovereignty internationally, the government's internal priority remained the consolidation of a secure and identifiably Irish state. This was the moment when the national community could be imagined afresh, with, as Maurice Manning suggests, "the not unreasonable expectation that the founding of the new state would mean the breaking of old moulds and the questioning of

²⁷ James Casey, *Constitutional Law in Ireland* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1987), 1, 7.

²⁸ Joe Cleary, 'Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context', *Éire-Ireland*, Vol.42, No.1/2 (Spring/Summer, 2007), 22.

²⁹ Cleary, 'Amongst Empires.' 22.

inherited attitudes.”³⁰ Unfortunately there was a failure of imagination. The focus was regulation and control when innovation could have inspired. The suffrage and nationalist activist and novelist, Rosamund Jacob, proved remarkably prescient in 1920 when warning of the dangers of co-opting colonial attitudes into the new state:

The network of British prohibitions and permissions which surround us seems to breed in us not a dislike to the whole troublesome tyrannous spirit of the thing, but a desire to set up a similar system of prohibitions and permissions of our own. We must have our own permits, our own censors. In spite of – or perhaps because of – our perpetual fight for national freedom, the principle of authority has ten times more weight with us than the principle of freedom. We love authority. We don’t feel comfortable except when we are told by our own native authorities what we may do or what we may not, what cinema pictures we may see, what Sunday papers we may read, what dances we may dance, what men we may speak to.³¹

At the administrative and political advice level, as 98% of civil servants transferred from the British service to the new Free State, they inevitably brought the culture of the British service with them. As Ronan Fanning has pointed out that there was “no immediate disturbance of any kind in the daily work of the average civil servant.”³² Thus, continuity was served, when Irish democracy may have benefited from the challenge of change. Declan Kiberd asserts, “independence means only that the old imperialist style of administration will be deployed by boys from Clongowes and

³⁰ Maurice Manning, ‘Women in Irish National and Local politics 1922-1977’, in Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds.), *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (Dublin: Arden House, 1978), 92.

³¹ Rosamund Jacob, quoted in Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy, (eds.), *Female Activists: Irish Women and Change 1900-1960* (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2003), 176.

³² Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Helicon Co., 1983), 61.

Belvedere rather than from Eton and Ampleforth; when, in 1933, the less-colonised Tweedledum replaced the more-colonised Tweedledee, nothing changed.”³³ While operating an imperial system, the state expected a nationalist outcome. As Eugene McLaughlin argues, “A concerted attempt was made to subordinate all socio-economic interests to the national-populist project of constructing and consolidating a Catholic, Gaelic and pastoral ‘imagined community’”.”³⁴

This “national-populist” project was essentially a “national-Catholic” project because not only were 93% of the population Catholic, but the circumstances of the occupation by Britain had ensured that Catholicism was largely synonymous with Irish identity. This closeness between the State and the Catholic Church remains the focus of much of the criticism of the Ireland of the first four decades of independence. At times it seemed – though often incorrectly – that the Church advised, the government legislated, and the Church used its parish clergy to communicate the message and gain support especially from the working class majority. As with diehard IRA members, the government occasionally proscribed organisations and the hierarchy excommunicated members who did not submit. The ideology shared by politicians of all the major parties, by the Catholic Church in Ireland and by the vast majority of the influential citizenry – the urban middle-class and the rural farmers – involved the commitment to maintaining a conservative and

³³ Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005), 173.

³⁴ Eugene McLaughlin ‘Ireland. From Catholic Corporatism to Social Partnership’, in Cochrane, A. et al.(eds.), *Comparing Welfare States. Britain in an International Context* (London: Sage, 1993), 228.

traditional lifestyle within a newly-created and distinctively Irish setting. The shared ideology gave coherence to all the actions of government and church hierarchies, priests and ministers. The legislation of the 1920s and 1930s, and de Valera's 1937 Constitution, now denigrated as repressive, were promulgated at the time as positive means to create the ideal Irish society. Achieving this ideal drove the disastrous economic policies that blinded the politicians to the poverty it was reinforcing. Cross-party support meant that legislation did not get rigorous parliamentary scrutiny, and any opposition could be ignored as a small minority.

To later generations the enduring image of the ideal Ireland that was being created in the first decades of the independent state is that expressed by Eamon de Valera in a Saint Patrick's Day broadcast in 1943:

The Ireland which we have dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous to the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.³⁵

The speech is commonly derided, and de Valera ridiculed as deluded. Michelle Dowling gives an alternative assessment:

De Valera never claims that this is the Ireland that exists. Rather it is the Ireland 'we would have'. It is an aspiration that is perfectly sensible albeit

³⁵ Eamon deValera, quoted in J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985 Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 334.

dressed in rather poetic terms. Stripped of its linguistic finery de Valera's vision is of a country where the people are gainfully employed, where disease and poverty are under control, where citizens of all ages, from children to grandparents may enjoy a life of dignity free from the degradations of want, it is a country in which spiritual concerns are more important than the materialism and greed regarded as typical of industrial nations.³⁶

Patrick Hanafin argues that "What de Valera was doing, in effect, was founding an Ireland of the imagination, an Ireland in which certain values were to prevail and others were to be excluded."³⁷ This imagined Ireland would never exist, but aspects of it did persist for some considerable time.³⁸

For the politicians, this vision of an idealised Ireland was valid and desirable. From a later and much-changed perspective, their ideal was narrow, exclusive and out-moded, and their policies and legislation irredentist, patriarchal and irredeemably oppressive. Moreover, the regular reaffirmation of the ideal worked to create the illusion of a shared national identity, and reduced the questioning that might have created a more balanced and inclusive model of nationhood. As Kearney indicates:

Myth may distort a community's self-understanding by eclipsing reality behind some idealised chimera. In such instances, the nostalgia for a

³⁶ Michelle Dowling, 'The Ireland that I would Have', *History Ireland*, Vol.5, No.2, (Summer, 1997), 38.

³⁷ Patrick Hanafin, 'Legal texts as Cultural Documents: Interpreting the Irish Constitution', in Ray Ryan, (ed.) *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 150.

³⁸ Brian Girvin, 'Social Change and political culture in the Republic of Ireland', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol.46, No.3 (July, 1993), 383.

golden age of the past or the zealous pursuit of a messianic future may blind us to the complexities and exigencies of our present realities.³⁹

While de Valera's speech provided evidence of the ideal Irishness aimed for by the political and church elites, Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland) articulates the officially-espoused and legally enacted Ireland and Irishness. It is an attempt to articulate a national identity; to pass from the imagined idea of Irishness to the realised state of Ireland.⁴⁰

The legislation of the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in the Constitution, has a unity provided by its fundamental ideology, which was then the widely accepted political and social philosophy. Jeffrey Prager argues that Irish political thought at the time was dominated by the Gaelic Romantic tradition. The particular Irishness that this tradition envisaged, clearly shared by de Valera and reflected in the values espoused in his speech, provided guiding principles to the drafters of the Constitution:

The nation ought to strive to re-create its past and resist those changes that seemed to challenge the basic meaning of Ireland as embodied in its traditions...Ireland was to be celebrated as a pre-industrial nation; its identity was to be found in its rural character. The sanctity of the family was to be preserved, the [Roman Catholic] Church was to remain a central social institution second only to the family, and the farm was to serve as the backbone of a healthy, thriving society.⁴¹

³⁹ Richard Kearney, 'Between Tradition and Utopia. The Hermeneutic Problem of Myth' in David Wood (ed.), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1991), 65.

⁴⁰ Hanafin, 'Legal texts', 149.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Prager, *Building Democracy in Ireland: Political Order and Cultural Integration in a Newly-independent Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 42.

To be inclusive, the document also had to reflect another strong strand of Irish political thought which Prager calls the Irish Enlightenment tradition. The Irish Enlightenment model posited “a social order characterised by autonomous individuals and independent spheres of social life in which the Irish citizen could rationally influence the course of Irish affairs.”⁴² By containing both Gaelic Romantic and Irish Enlightenment traditions, the Constitution built-in its own internal tensions, but also demonstrated its flexibility and comprehensiveness. The strength of the Constitution that de Valera inspired was that his imagined Ireland could not be imposed without a democratic vote, nor remain immutable, and it was in fact disputed and replaced through judicial reinterpretation as Irish culture changed.

Contentious as some articles now are, there was little dissension in 1937. The Gaelic Romantic version of Irishness which prioritised the group – the nation, the community, the parish, the village, the neighbours – and which had the idealised homestead with its cosy family at its core, dominated until the 1960s. Since then the Constitution has reflected the fundamental change in society, and has been read to increasingly recognise the primacy of the individual. The prevailing discourse has become that of the Irish Enlightenment tradition, and dissatisfaction with a Constitution conceived in the Gaelic Romantic tradition has increased. This switch from the family and group to the individual, accelerating since the 1960s, has significance for Irish novel writing. Critics of the novel reiterate the genre’s

⁴² Prager, *Building Democracy in Ireland*, 16.

necessary association with both the individual and with a society. For Ian Watt, the notions of society and of the individual in that society are central:

The novel's serious concerns with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general conditions: the society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels.⁴³

Prior to the 1960s, an Ireland that promoted uniform shared values and uniform ideas of acceptable behaviour, and which devalued the individual in favour of family and community, provided neither of the key ingredients Watt sees as essentials. This might suggest that the Ireland of the first four decades of independence was, indeed, not conducive to novel-writing. However, the family and the group, while the preferred focus, were not the exclusive focus, and the enacted guarantees of individuals' rights leaves open opportunities for the novelist to explore the tension between an individual character and a conforming society. The Constitution provides a benchmark – for it narrates an Ireland that was officially espoused, while the novelists narrate the Ireland that they experienced in reality and interpreted in their commentaries and their fiction.

The Constitution was the defining document of post-independent Ireland.

Seán MacEntee, a former Tánaiste and long-time cabinet minister claims:

The 1937 Constitution was a product of its age. It reflected the social thinking of the mass of the Irish people. Nothing was imposed in that

⁴³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 62.

Constitution. Everything was firstly discussed in the Dáil and then put to the Irish people. It reflects the general opinion of the mass of the Irish people.⁴⁴

Brendan Ryan claims “Of course, the association of the Constitution with Eamon de Valera and the 1930s is readily interpreted as further confirmation, if such be needed, of anachronism and sectarianism.”⁴⁵ Consequently, it is necessary to separate judgements about Ireland and the Constitution, and judgements about the impact on Irish life of Eamon de Valera himself, still seen by some as the embodiment of the Ireland of 1922 – 1970s. Indeed, having survived the death sentence as a leader of the 1916 Easter Rising, he became President of the First Dáil in 1919, was leader of the anti-Treatyites in 1922, then formed Fianna Fáil in 1926, led them into the Oireachtas in 1927 and into government in 1932. He was then Prime Minister (titled Taoiseach after 1937) for over 20 of the State’s first 37 years before becoming President of Ireland for a further 14 years. Paul Daly claims that:

According to popular legend (subscribed to, like most Irish popular legends, by half the populace) de Valera was a hidebound sexist and nationalist who took orders from the Catholic hierarchy when he wasn’t too busy plotting to roll back universal suffrage and reclaim *Hibernia Irredenta*.⁴⁶

Daly continues that “exposing the shallowness of the popular legend” is important because “it has had an extraordinary influence on the views of historians, lawyers

⁴⁴ Seán MacEntee, quoted in Joseph Lee and Gearoid Ó Tuathaigh, *The Age of de Valera* (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1982), 203.

⁴⁵ Brendan Ryan, ‘Information, Justice and Politics’, in Tim Murphy and Patrick Twomey (eds), *Ireland’s Evolving Constitution* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 1998), 237.

⁴⁶ Paul Daly, ‘A Sound Constitution’, *Dublin Review of Books*, http://www.drb.ie/more_details/08-09-25/A_Sound_Constitution.aspx, 2. Accessed 13.08.2012.

and the public” and argues that “the popular legend is largely an invention of modernisers and revisionists who wished to discredit de Valera.”⁴⁷

In recent decades the critical debate has centred on the Constitution’s undoubted Catholicism, the primacy it gives to the family, and the consequent role it envisages for women. At the time of its drafting and implementation the debate concerned nationalism and democracy. For some at the time the only problem was the impact on opinion in Northern Ireland of the whole-nation philosophy of Articles 2 and 3. For others the Dáil debates reflect the fear that the Constitution was a power grab by de Valera. As Farrell points out:

In the wrong hands Ireland could have gone the way of other European states in the dangerous Europe of the mid-1930s. De Valera by now had abolished the Senate, had an overall majority in the Dáil and a totally flexible Constitution with neither effective judicial review nor the requirements of a popular referendum to restrain his will. He could, by simple act of the single parliamentary chamber dominated by his party, make whatever constitutional changes he wished. It was a classic opportunity to establish a dictatorship.⁴⁸

There were many contemporary examples in Europe of the abandonment of the democratic electoral practices and governmental systems that had been established in the immediate post-war years 1918-1920. As Mair recounts, “Italy had already succumbed to an authoritarian regime in 1922 – the same year that Ireland established its democratic regime: Portugal followed in 1925, and then Poland and

⁴⁷ Daly, ‘A Sound Constitution’, 2.

⁴⁸ Brian Farrell, ‘From First Dáil through Irish Free State’, in Brian Farrell (ed.), *de Valera’s Constitution and Ours* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1988), 18.

Lithuania in 1926: Germany and Austria fell to authoritarianism in 1933, Estonia and Latvia in 1934; Greece in 1936 and Spain in 1939.”⁴⁹

De Valera took the opposite course – constructing a constitution to ensure that a dictatorship could not be established. By ensuring that the people were the source of sovereign power, the Constitution precluded any claims to a historical mandate by any extra-parliamentary nationalist groups. With its clear separation of powers, a universal adult franchise, electoral processes defined, proportional representation, a Presidency with the responsibility and the power to guard against any executive and legislative abuses, and a judiciary charged with strong powers of review, the Constitution is a “paradigmatic liberal democratic charter.”⁵⁰ The Irish constitution in its espousal of natural rights was ahead of its time. The fundamental rights section pre-dated by ten years the Universal Declaration on Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations in December 1948, and pre-dated by twelve years the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Unlike the Convention, the Constitution goes much further and protects rights not specifically mentioned. Fundamental rights are protected because they are fundamental.⁵¹ Garret Fitzgerald remarks that “the Irish Constitution offers very powerful protection for human

⁴⁹ Peter Mair, ‘De Valera and democracy’, in Tom Garvin, Maurice Manning and Richard Sinnott (eds.), *Dissecting Irish Politics* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2004), 36.

⁵⁰Daly, ‘A Sound Constitution’, 5.

⁵¹ Brian Walsh, “Foreword to the First Edition” in James Casey, *Constitutional Law in Ireland* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1982), x.

rights *vis-a-vis* the Executive and the Legislature – probably stronger protection than in any other parliamentary democracy.”⁵²

In the inter-World War decades, two population issues which would greatly impact on women’s lives preoccupied governments in America and Europe. The first was a serious decline in populations after 1900, exacerbated by World War One but mainly caused by the demographic transition from a pattern of high birth rates and high death rates to one of low birth rates and low death rates. The second issue was high levels of unemployment in the post-war recession which culminated in the Wall Street Crash on October 24th 1929, triggering the worldwide ‘Great Depression’. Politicians throughout the industrialised world, often driven by the demands of capital to provide workers and consumers, responded with population policies which directly affected their women citizens. Just as birth control information and mechanisms were becoming widely known and available, allowing women the opportunity of more economic freedom, a better standard of living, and to enjoy their sexuality separated from child-bearing, ideological policies demanded greater fertility. The Irish government solution was unexceptional. Their narrations idealised their narrowly-defined construct of family, motherhood and domesticity while their legislation and regulation encouraged high fertility by limiting birth control.

⁵² Garret Fitzgerald, ‘The Irish Constitution in its Historical Context’, in Tim Murphy and Patrick Twomey, (eds.), *Ireland’s Evolving Constitution*, (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 1998), 38.

Women's roles in Ireland and elsewhere had been changing fundamentally throughout the nineteenth century. With the virtual disappearance of cottage industries, and the change from tillage to pasture farming, the traditional female work changed. Whereas the traditional gender division was based on the practical needs of the family as a unit of production, the new role was imagined as if based on 'natural' character traits. Harriss sums up the common characterisation of women within contemporary Western culture at the turn of the century:

As women's nature was viewed as being governed more by feeling than reason, making women more receptive and yielding, loving and caring and selfless than men, they were also ideally equipped for the care of the home and husband, the sick and old, the rearing of children and their socialization, acting as the moral guardians of the home and of society at large.⁵³

Associated with this conceptualisation of women was an assertion of female vulnerability in the public sphere of business and politics, which therefore required the protection of the male. This was the justification of governments implementing 'protective' legislation which proved, inevitably, to be oppressive legislation.

One government response in Ireland to a declining birth-rate was the Censorship of Publications Act (1929). While its impact was to ban works of literature both worthwhile and worthless, to hinder Irish writers of quality, and to lastingly damage Ireland's reputation, one of its primary purposes had been simply to restrict access to contraceptive information. Section 16 of the Act made it a crime

⁵³ Harriss (ed.), *The Family*, 45.

to print, publish, sell or distribute “any book or periodical publication which advocates or might reasonably be supposed to advocate the unnatural prevention of contraception.”⁵⁴ The ban on advertising or providing family planning advice was made even more effective by the imposition of a heavy tax on imported newspapers and magazines in 1933, and threats to seize any newspapers that continued to advise or advertise. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (1935) banned the importation and sale of contraceptive devices. Such was the consensus of the time that no protests about the contraceptive ban were raised, though sections raising the age of consent to fifteen and the introduction of a six month jail sentence for prostitution were opposed unsuccessfully.⁵⁵ Indeed, the Anglican Mothers’ Union argued that “all artificial checks to conception are against the laws of nature,”⁵⁶ and it was only from the 1940s onwards that the Church of Ireland took the view that birth control was a matter for the consciences of married couples.⁵⁷ In the United Kingdom no medical school gave instruction in contraceptives to its students until after World War II.⁵⁸ The widespread belief in Ireland that if women were to be removed from the workplace there would be little male unemployment was shared by several other

⁵⁴ Section 16, *Censorship of Publications Act, 1929* <http://www.acts.ie/en.act.1929.0021.1.html> Accessed 03.05.2010.

⁵⁵ Caitriona Beaumont, ‘Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1948’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol.6, No.4, (1997), 572.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Beaumont, ‘Women, Citizenship and Catholicism’, 572.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Milne, ‘The Church of Ireland since Partition’, in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh, (eds.), *Christianity in Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002), 221.

⁵⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 165.

European countries. Reacting to the high unemployment level during the depression years of the 1920s and 1930s, attempts were made to give priority to male workers.⁵⁹ In 1925 the Cumann na nGhaedheal government proposed the Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Bill which sought to restrict civil service examinations according to sex, and in effect to confine women to the lower grades in the civil service. The Bill was defeated in the Séanad.

De Valera's Fianna Fáil government, coming to power in 1932, shared the same conception of women and their role, and reacted similarly to the population and employment crises. In 1932 they introduced a marriage bar in the public service obliging female civil servants and, from 1934, female teachers to resign on their marriage. Irish attitudes and practices differed little from other countries, for such marriage bars were operated elsewhere, notably in the United Kingdom.⁶⁰ Mary Daly points out that "Government policy was less interested in pushing women back into the home (few Irish women had ever left) than in ensuring that the majority of newly created jobs would be filled by men."⁶¹ The introduction of the Conditions of Employment Act (1935) made clear government policy to alleviate high levels of male unemployment was to be at the cost of limiting female employment. Section 16 gave the Minister for Industry and Commerce the power to control, restricting if felt

⁵⁹ Beaumont, 'Women, Citizenship and Catholicism', 571.

⁶⁰ Mary Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.6, No.4/Vol.7, No.1 (Winter/Spring, 1995), 102.

⁶¹ Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State', 110.

fit, the number of women employed in any given industry. Clearly such powers were extreme; however, they were never implemented.⁶² Other sections of the Act were implemented, and these were progressive in their day – guaranteeing paid holidays, and regulating overtime, shift-work and night-work. In fact, female employment expanded during the 1930s despite popular views favouring jobs for men. Economic forces trumped political policies.

The family was central to life in Ireland. It was unremarkable that the Constitution should declare:

41.1.1 The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.

41.1.2 The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.

Walsh asserts that this statement of the family's right would be accepted in any European state and continues, "That the state has guaranteed to protect the family in its Constitution and in its authority as the necessary basis of social order is scarcely unexpected and is to be found in the Constitutions of other countries."⁶³ The priority that the governments and the Catholic Church gave to their idealised "Family", and their belief in what constituted such a family and what State and Church must do to protect and support their vision, guided all their actions. The identification of the

⁶² Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State', 110.

⁶³ Brian Walsh, 'The Constitution and Constitutional Rights', *Administration*, Vol.35, No.4 (1988), 95.

family as the basic unit of society involved the construction of particular sexual and familial roles that eventually became “the very substance of what it means to be Irish.”⁶⁴ These ideological constructions were bound up with the image of Ireland as a traditional and rural society. The discourse of religious and lay leaders reinforced a view which idealised domesticity, seemed to conflate ‘woman’ with ‘mother’, and then expected ‘mother’ to become the enforcer of tradition and conformity.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Europe and in America, practices of familial privacy based on a free choice of partners and a companionate marriage with partners developing as individuals were evolving. In Ireland, an ideology of tradition discouraged such privacy. Here traditional marriage, if not match-made then often for property or economic reasons, was encouraged, as was involvement in community as well as family. Collective memory and shared experience were valued rather than individual experience.⁶⁶ Wills argues that when ‘modern’ domesticity emerged within the Irish family in the early part of the twentieth century it was “a form of domesticity which eschewed the bourgeois ideals of ‘privacy’ or ‘intimacy’ –

⁶⁴ Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991), 6.

⁶⁵ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 9, 72.

⁶⁶ Clair Wills, ‘Women, Domesticity and the Family: Recent Feminist Work in Irish Cultural Studies’, *Cultural Studies*, Vol.15, No.1 (2000), 36-37.

a development which has important consequences for the evolution of the relationship between the family and the individual in Ireland.”⁶⁷ .

The idealisation of domesticity led to the allegation that the State intended women to be kept in their place – and their place was their home. The main contentious Articles are Articles 41 and 45:

41.2.1 In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2.2 The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

Kennedy explains:

The Constitution of 1922 made no reference to either the family or marriage. Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution, which deals with both, was highly innovative. It was also influential. The former President of the High Court, Mr. Justice Costello has pointed out that explicit reference to the family, novel in the 1937 Constitution, was subsequently made by the United Nations in the Declaration of Human Rights, by the Council of Europe, by the Organisation of South American States and by the Organisation of African Unity. Other countries have apparently followed this lead.⁶⁸

In opening the second reading of the constitution de Valera asked:

Is there any mother who is a mother who will say that it is right that when her husband is idle or otherwise when she has the care of her children that she should be forced by economic necessity – she is not forced by law and is not prevented by law from doing these things – and by our social system to go and earn what is necessary to maintain the household?⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Wills, ‘Women, Domesticity and the Family’, 41.

⁶⁸ Finola Kennedy, ‘Two Priests, the Family and the Irish Constitution’, *Studies*, Vol.87, No.348 (Winter 1998)), 353.

⁶⁹ Dáil Debates 11 May 1937.

The sentiments may be paternalistic, but the intention is the protection of women and mothers. Fianna Fáil Deputy Helena Concannon certainly considered it protective, supporting the proposals by saying:

I sincerely hope that not a comma of this noble declaration will be altered...Do we not know that the price of each human life is some woman's agony. Do we not know that the rearing of each child is purchased at the cost of some woman's sleepless nights and hard-working days. Why, then, should we begrudge to women that the state should honour them for their contribution to the state's support and its common good. It does not mean the door is closed to women in spheres other than motherhood – if it did I would be the first to protest against it.⁷⁰

Article 41.2.1. could actually be seen as a victory for Irishwomen. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s British organisations, such as the National Federation of Womens' Institutes, had campaigned unsuccessfully for official government recognition of the work done by women in the home, with the hope that this would be rewarded with family allowances and free health care.⁷¹

The arguments about the rights and the roles of women were echoed in other countries. "A constant theme of social policy in most countries", points out Harriss, "has been the need to ensure the stability of family life, and whenever social and political elites have felt at all threatened a part of their response has been to argue for revival of 'stable' family values."⁷² There was often a contradiction between a

⁷⁰ Dáil Debates 12 May 1937 .

⁷¹ Beaumont, "Women, Citizenship and Catholicism", 574.

⁷² Harriss (ed.), *The Family*, 18.

government's espousal of woman's equal rights and the practical impact of social policies. These policies often depended on the unpaid labour of 'women as mothers' in the home to reproduce and nurture the necessary workforce, and future consumers. In the United Kingdom the Beveridge Report argued: "In the next thirty years housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world."⁷³ The roles of women in the Ireland of the 1930s were comparable with those of women in Britain and Germany. Caitriona Beaumont points out, "it is clear that the ideology of domesticity so prevalent in those countries was also an accepted social norm in the Irish Free State...the result was that by 1937 home-making for Irish women citizens was regarded as part of the 'natural order', an ideal to be attained by the majority of women."⁷⁴ Indeed in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s most women did work within the home. The 1936 census reports that 552,176 were working unpaid within the home, while 226,816 were in paid employment.⁷⁵ For many women the image of home-maker was familiar and welcomed. Joseph Lee believes that "de Valera's image of woman was widely cherished in Ireland, not least by women themselves."⁷⁶

⁷³ Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London: HMSO, 1942), 53. Quoted in Finola Kennedy, *Cottage to Creche. Family Change in Ireland* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2001), 7.

⁷⁴ Caitriona Beaumont, 'Gender, Citizenship and the State, 1922-1990', in Scott Brewster et al. (eds), *Ireland in Proximity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 101-102.

⁷⁵ Beaumont, 'Women, Citizenship and Catholicism', 578.

⁷⁶ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 207.

Kate O'Brien presents one such woman content in herself, her family and with society in Una Costello, a central character in *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938).⁷⁷ In this disputatious novel which constantly examines contrasting characters, situations and attitudes, Una represents the home-centred family woman, and her sister Nell Mahoney represents the modern, independently-minded woman. O'Brien presents Una as an entirely fulfilled woman, wife and mother, who has chosen the conventional role not been constrained into it. Being happy in herself she is happy that others are true to their very different selves. Una's contrast, Nell, is also sympathetically drawn, being characterised as attractive, kindly, generous and loving as well as the intellectual match for anybody, and comfortable with her brand of femininity. In this rather plotless novel, the two female characters bring a real life being lived and enjoyed, while the male characters merely pontificate, having theoretical, and ultimately pointless, debates about every little issue that arises.

While attitudes to women's roles in Ireland were echoed in other countries, the role of the Catholic Church in Irish society was distinctively different to elsewhere. At the time, Church influence was accepted as normal, and was welcomed by many. The major criticism was that the religious articles were insufficiently Catholic.⁷⁸ Articles 44.1.2 and 44.1.3 state:

⁷⁷ Kate O'Brien, *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951).

⁷⁸ Chubb, *The Constitution*, 48.

44.1.2. The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens.

44.1.3. The State also recognises the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, as well as the Jewish Congregations and the other religious denominations existing in Ireland at the date of coming into operation.

Lee argues that, "Article 44, when read in its entirety, simply recognised reality, and was indeed a very moderate official recognition of the influence of the Church in Ireland. In many respects, Article 44 could stand as a liberal, even noble, expression of the principle of religious toleration."⁷⁹ Specifically naming and recognising other denominations was exceptional in an age in which politicians were liable to express intolerance. Northern Ireland's Prime Minister James Craig in 1934 had said "All I boast of is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state."⁸⁰ Brian Walsh commented about the 1972 deletion of Articles 44.1.2 and 44.1.3, saying :

What is often overlooked is that the deleted provisions were the only constitutional provisions in the world, then or since, to have given express recognition to the Jewish congregations, and that this was given at a time in history when the greatest agony of that gifted people had already begun in Europe.⁸¹

Keogh claims that "The explicit mention of the Jewish congregations was a deliberate challenge to the anti-Semitism of the vociferous supporters of right-wing Catholic thought. The framing of Article 44 on religion, in particular, helped de

⁷⁹ Joseph Lee, 'Fractured Sovereignty: Partition', in Joseph Lee and Gearoid Ó Tuathaigh (eds.), *The Age of de Valera* (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1982), 101.

⁸⁰ James Craig, quoted in Patrick Buckland, *A History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1981), 55.

⁸¹ Walsh, 'The Constitution and Constitutional Rights', 104.

Valera face up to the latent sectarianism and basic intolerance in sections of Irish society.”⁸²

De Valera stood firm in his determination not to establish the Catholic Church as the official religion of the State. He astutely prevented the Irish hierarchy instructing a rejection of the Constitution by sending Joseph Walshe on a diplomatic mission to the Vatican. De Valera conducted a short but intensive round of negotiations with the leaders of the denominations. Negotiations and briefings were held with Dr. Gregg and Charles D’Arcy, respectively the Church of Ireland Archbishops of Dublin and Armagh, and with Reverend Massey, head of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and Dr. Irwin, Moderator of the Presbyterians. It is noteworthy that the leaders of the other Christian denominations did not raise complaints about the confessional nature of the Constitution, reflecting that in 1937 there was considerable conformity of opinion across the various denominations on moral issues and on acceptable social behaviour.

Catholic teachings influenced politics and policies because the decision-makers shared the ideology of those teachings, not because of instructions to government from the institutional Church. Shared beliefs created a consensus across political parties on legislation concerning moral issues. Thomas Bartlett points out:

⁸² Dermot Keogh, ‘The Irish Constitutional Revolution: An Analysis of the Making of the Constitution’, *Administration*, Vol.35, No.4 (1988), 39.

Thus William Cosgrave refused to legalise divorce in the 1920s, while Eamon de Valera made it unconstitutional in his 1937 Constitution. Cosgrave's government brought in censorship of films and books, while that of de Valera regulated those notorious occasions of sin, dance-halls. And while Cosgrave's government banned the advocacy of contraception, de Valera's prohibited the import or sale of contraceptives. Little enough of this seems to have been at the direct behest of the hierarchy, for there was in fact no need for it to make representations on any of these questions. Politicians of all hues – Cumann na nGaedhael, Fianna Fáil, or indeed Labour – vied with each other to give legislative shape to the dominant ethos of what was essentially an emigrant society. There were of course a few protests – from some Protestants and from a few literary types – but these could be ignored. On these matters, church and state were as one.⁸³

It is not surprising that the ruling elites of State and Church were as one, for they shared not only a religious and a nationalist culture, but also similar social backgrounds and were educated at the same schools. The dominant ethos of both elites was conservative and puritanical, driven by a determination to maintain traditional standards, and traditional way of life. Indeed, they proved in their actions the truth of Kevin O'Higgins' now famous observation, "We were probably the most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution."⁸⁴

Significant legislation in the first decade of independence reflected this conservatism. The Censorship of Films Act (1923) empowered an official censor to order cuts, or to refuse a licence to films he considered a danger to public morality. The Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1924 restricted the hours of opening of public houses,

⁸³ Thomas Bartlett, 'Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923-1970: An appraisal reappraised', in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds.), *Christianity in Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002), 253.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Finola Kennedy, *Cottage to Crèche* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2001), 151.

while that of 1927 began to reduce the numbers of premises licensed. The Censorship of Publications Act (1929), established a Censorship of Publications board with wide powers to prohibit the sale of publications considered to have a 'general tendency' towards obscenity or indecency. These Acts all followed either formal consultation with interest groups, or visits of deputations representing such groups. On all these issues, the consulted groups represented various religious denominations, and cross-community interests. The legislation reflected the opinion of the day, not simply Catholic teaching.

However, William Cosgrave's government did offend minority opinion by making divorce impossible. The British government had never created any Irish divorce courts – divorce could only be obtained by a Private Member's Bill. This power was transferred to the Irish Parliament on independence, and three private divorce bills were presented. Cosgrave's government's response was to amend parliamentary standing orders so that such private member's bills could not be introduced, thus making divorce unobtainable. This reflected not just the Catholic view, for the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1920 declared that marriage was a lifelong and indissoluble union.⁸⁵ In Ireland, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin emphasised that the Anglican church had 'always fought unflinchingly for the indissolubility of marriage.' That same year, the Anglican Bishop of Meath declared that divorce should only be granted 'for the one reason laid down by

⁸⁵ Robert McDowell, *The Church of Ireland 1869-1969* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 112.

Christ' and that the guilty party should not in any circumstances be allowed to marry again and should be treated not only as a sinner but as a criminal.⁸⁶ However, most Protestants and many liberal Catholics, objected to the intolerance of executive action that was interpreted as driven by Catholic teaching. In the Senate debate, W.B. Yeats, though derided for his claim that the Anglo-Irish were indeed "no petty people" but "one of the great stocks of Europe", had a valid complaint when claiming that it was "tragic that within three years of this country gaining its independence we should be discussing a measure which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly oppressive."⁸⁷

From the beginnings of the State, strict adherence to Catholicism did not prevent politicians showing independence of the Catholic hierarchy. In elementary and intermediate education, control of which the Catholic hierarchy had made a priority, the government abolished the semi-independent boards which had strong clerical representation, and put management within a government department. Secondary schools owned and run by religious orders were obliged through changes to the financial regulations to employ a proportion of lay teachers.⁸⁸ During the Civil War, Archbishop Byrne of Dublin had lobbied in favour of clemency, and failed.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ McDowell, *The Church of Ireland*, 112-113.

⁸⁷ Séanad Debates 11 June 1925.

⁸⁸ Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland. 1929-1979* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1980), 35.

⁸⁹ Bartlett, 'Church and State in Modern Ireland', 253.

De Valera's decision not to include many of the Catholic hierarchy's suggestions in the 1937 Constitution, continued this tradition. Many of Archbishop McQuaid's submissions failed to persuade. For example the Constitution does not mention banning contraception, or the official government promotion – through taxation – of early marriage and large families.⁹⁰ Father Cahill, a Jesuit invited to make suggestions, pointed out that many of the articles, for example those dealing with fundamental rights, were not specifically Catholic in origin or form. He regretted that the Constitution did not express the principle of denominationalism in health and education.⁹¹ Cahill had also wanted to create local committees in the countryside elected by family heads and similar to those in Salazar's Portugal.⁹² He also objected to the Church of Ireland being referred to as a "church", writing to de Valera, "I presume you know that the term 'Church of Ireland' which occurs in Art. 44.1.3 has aroused no end of criticism and surprise; for it really seems to be an authoritative approval of a piece of lying propaganda. I hope it will be changed."⁹³ It was not.

Throughout the first four decades of independence all major politicians of all parties, and the overwhelming majority of their electorates, accepted that Ireland

⁹⁰ Kennedy, 'Two Priests', 359.

⁹¹ Seán Faughnan, 'The Jesuits and the drafting of the Irish Constitution', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol.xxvi, No.101 (May 1988), 95.

⁹² Dermot Keogh, 'The Jesuits and the 1937 Constitution', *Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 309 (Spring 1989), 92.

⁹³ Faughnan, 'The Jesuits and the drafting of the Irish Constitution', 98.

was a confessional state. “De Valera’s real achievement in Church-State relations”, argues Emmet Larkin, “cannot be fully appreciated if it is not understood that while he has done much to make the Irish state more confessional, he has also prevented it from becoming any more clerical.”⁹⁴ While the 93% of people in the Irish Free State who were Catholic overwhelmingly welcomed independence, for the remaining population who were members of other Christian and non-Christian faith communities, the future was more insecure. In the event, the political transition to independence was managed effectively by the leaders of the religious minority groups and the new government. Archbishop John Gregg, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin 1920-1938, encouraged his congregations: “It concerns us all that we should have a strong, wise and capable government. And therefore it concerns us all to offer to the Irish Free State so shortly to be constituted our loyalty and our goodwill.”⁹⁵

Often, there was not a clear confessional divide. Over many areas of social life, peoples’ attitudes were as much a reflection of their social class as their religious denomination. Protestant groups lobbied for the censorship of films and publications as determinedly as did Catholic lay groups. Protestant clergymen served on the censorship boards alongside Catholic priests. What resonates as divisive was the continuous confessional rhetoric. While state documents, such as the Preamble to

⁹⁴Emmet Larkin, ‘Church, State and Nation in Modern Ireland’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. lxxx No. 5, (December 1975), 1275.

⁹⁵ Archbishop John Gregg, quoted in Milne, ‘The Church of Ireland since Partition’), 222.

Bunreacht na hÉireann, aimed to use religious sentiments acceptable to all Christian faiths, influential ministers occasionally expressed their confessional bias. The Taoiseach, John A. Costello, claimed in the Dáil debate on the “Mother and child” crisis in 1951 that he accepted “without qualification in all respects the social teaching of the Church as interpreted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Ireland.”⁹⁶ The atmosphere of Catholic triumphalism engendered by the Eucharistic Congress must have accentuated feelings of separateness and exclusion.⁹⁷

From the foundation of the State, ministers had their agendas for change. However, the reform agendas of both the Cumann na nGaedheal and the Fianna Fáil governments in the 1920s and 1930s were constrained by two over-riding conditions – the security and the economic situations. Whilst determined government action improved stability, the economy proved far more difficult. Even if creating a prosperous Irish national economic system had been possible in the difficult worldwide conditions of the 1920s, 1930s and during World War Two, successive Irish governments notably failed to do so. Material poverty marked the lives of the great majority of Irish people. The Cumann na nGaedheal government in their determination to please the international community with their fiscal prudence, exacted a high price for it from their own citizens. Prominent government minister Patrick McGilligan stated the official ruthlessness: “People may have to die in this

⁹⁶ Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 317.

⁹⁷ Rory O’Dwyer, ‘On Show to the World. The Eucharistic Congress 1932’, *History Ireland*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2007), 44.

country, and die through starvation."⁹⁸ They did. In 1927 the Sullivan family from Adrigole, near Castletownbere, Co. Cork, having drained all their resources to pay land annuities for transfer to Britain, starved to death. This tragedy so angered the republican fighter, social revolutionary and realist novelist Peadar O'Donnell that he wrote the deeply moving *Adrigole* (1929) as a warning and a call-to-action to prevent a recurrence.⁹⁹ The novel follows the Dalachs, Hughie and Brigid, from children travelling for seasonal work first in the Lagan and later to Scotland, to their marriage and struggle to survive on the infertile, boggy land of the lower valley. The story proceeds through the civil war years when their meagre food supply is rapidly depleted by guerrillas on the run. As a result of their republicanism, the Dalachs are ostracised by their neighbours. In desperation, Hughie gets involved in illegal poteen distilling and is arrested and imprisoned. He returns to discover the bodies of his wife and two of his children, and his other children at death's door. The scene drives him insane.

The novel is well-conceived and effectively constructed. The mood builds to a crescendo, yet the ending comes as an unforgettable shock. The innocence of youths heading off to the shared adventures of the hiring fair sets the tone of a hard life but bearable with the support of companions. The later depictions of the insidious bog begins to remove any optimism and the gloom is intensified by the attitude of un-neighbourly neighbours. The ending shocks – not just because of the deaths but

⁹⁸ Quoted in R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), 520.

⁹⁹ Peadar O'Donnell, *Adrigole* (1929) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929).

because it is so unexpected. Hughie in his cell happily thinks of home: "he held on to his illusion and slept quickly; all his folks were happy."¹⁰⁰ Within pages we know different. There is a clear sequence of events with identifiable cause and effect, and the demonstration that some events are unpredictable and responses are constrained by circumstances. Without moralising, O'Donnell raises the ethical problems and the social and cultural issues, but in this novel there is only one resolution. In isolation there is no future. The characterisation of Hughie and Brigid ensures that the reader empathises with them. As strong people coping with the worst their world can do to them, their sudden surrender by lying down to die, and giving up to madness, shocks the reader into dramatic involvement and makes this a memorable novel.

In accepting the situation it inherited, the Cumann na nGaedheal government was supported by the civil service and economists whose training and mindset was that of the British laissez-faire tradition.¹⁰¹ In the destruction that accompanied the establishment of the State, it was necessary for the founding government to create confidence. Professor George O'Brien, himself an influential member of several Commissions, argues "A stable monetary and financial system is like a stable political structure. It is part of the essential infra-structure of economic progress." O'Brien goes on to point out that the financial system so carefully established had proved so robust, that, "In the disturbed forty years since the Treaty there has not

¹⁰⁰ O'Donnell, *Adriagoole*, 304.

¹⁰¹ Patrick Lynch, 'The Irish Free State and the Republic of Ireland: 1921-66', in T.W.Moody and F.X.Martin (eds.) *The Course of Irish History* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2001), 281.

been a single banking failure in Ireland.”¹⁰² While politicians acknowledged the need for improvement and modernisation of agricultural practice, output quality and marketing, they lacked an industrial ideology, so did not create an industrial base that would modify the balance of employment, 80:20 agriculture/non-agriculture.¹⁰³

The Cumann na nGaedheal government did show a willingness to listen. Several commissions were established to investigate and advise upon the difficult economic position of the new state. The Fiscal Inquiry Committee reported cautiously about protective tariffs with the result that only a small measure of protection was given to a narrow range of industries.¹⁰⁴ A Tariff Commission was set up to report on applications from manufacturers for protection of which few were actioned. Indeed when Britain reacted to the economic crisis in 1931 by introducing protective tariffs it left “Ireland as virtually the only free trade economy in Europe”¹⁰⁵ – hardly the stance of an insular, defensive state.

In contrast to Cumann na nGaedheal’s conservatism, the Fianna Fáil government won power in 1932 on a radical economic platform. In the changed world economic conditions of the Great Depression years, defensive measures were

¹⁰² George O’Brien, ‘The Economic Progress of Ireland. 1912-1962’, *Studies*, Vol.51, No.201 (Spring,1962), 24.

¹⁰³ Patricia Redlich, ‘Women and the Family’, in Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds.), *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (Dublin: Arlen House, 1978), 83.

¹⁰⁴ O’Brien, ‘The Economic Progress’, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1981), 145.

taken in every country to protect their balances of payments.¹⁰⁶ Fianna Fáil proposed protectionist tariffs for industry and agriculture. Principally, however, their manifesto coherently planned economic separation from Britain. In March 1932 they withheld the land annuities due under the pre-independence Land Acts, and acted to review the police pension agreements of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. At the same time, at the Imperial Trade Conference in Ottawa, Seán T. O'Kelly negotiated trade agreements with other dominion governments, but not Britain.¹⁰⁷ In retaliation, and to recoup the annuities, the British government imposed a 20% duty on two-thirds of all Irish imports to Britain. In July, the Irish government responded with the Emergency Imposition of Duties Act (1932), which imposed tariffs on British imports including 20% on iron and steel, machinery, electrical goods and cement. Whatever the matters of principle involved, the Irish economy was always going to suffer the greater damage from what became known as the “economic war”, given the disparity in trade balance, with 96% of Irish exports going to Britain while less than 10% of British exports went to Ireland. Consequently, Irish exports to Britain in 1935 had a value of £18million while those in 1929 had been £43.5million.¹⁰⁸ Though the farmers were the chief victims of this “war”, they remained solidly behind the government's policies.¹⁰⁹ However, mutual self-interest soon intervened. In 1935 the

¹⁰⁶ O'Brien, 'The Economic Progress' 15.

¹⁰⁷ University College Cork, *Multitext Project* , 4.

¹⁰⁸ University College Cork, *Multitext Project* , 4.

¹⁰⁹ Lynch, 'The Irish Free State', 276.

Cattle-Coal pact was negotiated by which Britain accepted a 50% increase in Irish cattle imports for Irish agreement to only import coal from Britain. Further pacts followed. In 1938, it suited both sides to negotiate the Anglo-Irish Agreement which reopened unrestricted access to each other's markets, resolved finally the land annuities issue with a one-off payment of £10million, and returned the British naval facilities in Ireland. Rather than an intransigent refusal to deal with Britain on ideological grounds, the Irish government had in fact absorbed short-term economic pain, for lasting economic and political gain.

Fianna Fáil's economic strategy, which became associated with long-time Minister of Trade and Commerce Seán Lemass, was import-substituting industrialisation (ISI). ISI policy accepted that agriculture, whilst at the core of the economy, could never provide the employment necessary for a successful national community, and that free trade would not accommodate the new industries needed to provide the required jobs. Positive intervention was necessary. The government policy was not simply a negative imposition of protective tariffs but a willingness to positively invest in industrial start-ups. The problem was the nature of any market as small as Ireland. Once the capital investment becomes productive, the enterprise may initially flourish to satisfy Irish consumers. However, once the small domestic market is sated, demand collapses and the business fails because these new industries were neither designed for – nor capable of – competing in the export market. While these initiatives showed the government's positive intentions, there

was never the quantity of capital investment available to alter the economic fundamentals of an under-developed agriculture, very little industrialisation with few raw materials, a small domestic market and an overwhelming dependence on one export destination. Faced with these economic realities, Irish governments acted pragmatically. Unable to compete internationally, they survived by short-term fixes while working to modernise as best they could.

Ireland's neutrality during World War Two inevitably increased economic isolation. Though, as difficult as shortages, unemployment and emigration were, the people endured the hardships as a small price to pay for neutrality.¹¹⁰ In the immediate post-war era, there was an improvement in the economy reflected in a rise of personal expenditure of about 25%.¹¹¹ However, by the late 1940s and into the 1950s Ireland's economy was in serious difficulty. World economic problems were continuing, and Ireland's predicament was exacerbated by the currency's link with sterling which was devalued in 1948. Emigration reached the century's high as the working population declined by 100,000 between 1946 and 1957.¹¹² Agricultural income remained artificially low, due to the dependence on a British market controlled by British government intervention. Irish-owned industry remained

¹¹⁰ Lynch, 'The Irish Free State', 278.

¹¹¹ University College Cork, *Multitext Project*, 8-9.

¹¹² Cormac Ó Gráda, 'From "Frugal comfort" to Ten Thousand a Year: Trade and Growth in the Irish Economy', in Ray Ryan (ed.), *Writing in the Irish Republic* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 269.

dependent on a stagnant home market, itself diminished by emigration and by reduced consumer spending resulting from the high unemployment levels.

The failure of the Irish economy to recover when other countries had begun to do so, required a re-appraisal of policy. By the early 1950s, Seán Lemass was coming to suspect that many of the firms created since 1932 under his protective regimes were, in fact, profiteering, and that new industries should be able to survive without protection.¹¹³ However, it was only by the late 1950s, that Lemass began to remove tariff restrictions on imports. By then he had already begun a policy of removing restrictions on foreign capital inflows, and of positively encouraging manufacturers to establish export-bound operations through systems of tax incentives.

A severe economic crisis in 1956 precipitated Fianna Fáil's return to government with an expectation that change was necessary. On government request T. K. Whitaker, head of the civil service, produced a survey entitled *Economic Development*. Acting on Whitaker's report, the government in 1958 published its *Programme for Economic Expansion*, to be followed in 1963-4 by the *Second Programme*. While it is debateable whether the *Programme* was the cause of the economic recovery that followed, or that it was published fortuitously and coincided with greatly improved international economic conditions, growth after 1958 increased by 4% per year.¹¹⁴ Ireland was enabled to begin competing internationally, and to begin

¹¹³ Ó Gráda, 'From "Frugal Comfort"', 267.

¹¹⁴ Lynch, 'The Irish Free State', 283.

to improve living conditions, particularly with improvements to the housing stock, and extending electricity throughout rural areas.

Economists and economic historians disagree when reviewing the State's economic performance. Cormac Ó Gráda argues that pre-1921 living standards and productivity were converging on those of Britain but "Between the 1920s and 1980s, however, Ireland lost ground to its neighbours."¹¹⁵ In 1962, Professor O'Brien claimed "there is nothing in the history of the last forty years to suggest that Ireland has proved unequal to the task of self-government in the economic field. There is nothing to warrant a spirit of pessimism, defeatism or despair."¹¹⁶ His reasoning is that the standard of living of the average citizen had risen, and, if not as high as that elsewhere, that was because of the lack of natural resources. If not an affluent society it was less a society of paupers. He argues that this had been achieved without external borrowing, no artificial and inflationary stimulations of demand, no unbalanced national budgets, no repudiation of public or private debt, and all "within a framework of political stability and of monetary and financial rectitude."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ó Gráda, 'From "Frugal Comfort"', 263

¹¹⁶ O'Brien, 'The Economic Progress', 26.

¹¹⁷ O'Brien, 'The Economic Progress', 26.

After a century during which great empires were dissolved and so many countries gained their independence, it can be overlooked that the first Irish Free State's governments had no such prior models from which to learn. As Declan Kiberd points out, "Being the first English-speaking people this century to decolonise, the Irish were doomed to walk in relative darkness down a now-familiar road."¹¹⁸ Yet their actions were remarkably successful. As Brian Girvan considers:

In contrast to many other states in the world, Ireland has had a remarkably stable political history since independence. In turn, that stability has been coupled with a commitment to liberal democratic political institutions by the vast majority of the state's citizens. In comparative terms, this is unusual: indeed Ireland is one of the very few state's emerging after the first world war which retained constitutional government unimpaired by the instabilities which prevailed between the two world wars. In sharp contrast, Northern Ireland has experienced instability, polarisation, and ethnic conflict for most of its existence¹¹⁹

The encouragement of a distinctively Irish culture was widely accepted, though the official sponsorship of the Irish language was notably unsuccessful. The essential problem was simply that the pervasiveness of the British influence in all aspects of Irish life was such that the attempt to distance the economy and the culture from Britain only demonstrated how near-inseparable Ireland had become. The policy of defining Ireland as a unique entity, legally, economically and culturally, was accepted by most as necessary in a new state that had to give a form to the imagined community of its citizens. There was an influential minority who opposed such a definition, as it marginalised or excluded them. This included many of those of

¹¹⁸ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer*, 146.

¹¹⁹ Girvan, 'Social Change and Political Culture', 381.

English and Anglo-Irish descent, whose natural instinct remained union with Britain. Members of this minority community had an influence disproportionate to their numbers. Similarly disproportionate was their access to print media to record their dissatisfactions.

The Free State censored its books; it did not censor opinion. Its internal critics, alienated by the dominant ideology and the insensitivity of much of its implementation, found much to criticise, and found sufficient outlets to publish their criticisms. These critical writings survive to provoke the common perception that the 1920s and 1930s could be dismissed as a “cultural wasteland.” Nicholas Allen counters this:

The evidence from newspapers, diaries, photographs, letters, sketchbooks, paintings and journals suggest otherwise. In mining these sources complex relations become visible between literature, art and the fractured state that emerged after the Treaty. Ireland is no longer a dead site of faded ideals. It is a continuing space in which to test culture’s influence on a new state, a state rethinking itself in context of its experience of empire, partition and withdrawal.¹²⁰

While published writings, both positive and negative, survive, small examples of an intellectually active people have disappeared with those people – the hundreds of local sporting, cultural, religious and political organisations, their productions and performances, their small-scale publications. The hundreds of parish and community halls still extant suggest a people involved, not apathetic.

¹²⁰ Nicholas Allen, *Modernism, Ireland and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4, 4.

Bunreacht na hÉireann defines the legal structures of the officially-espoused Ireland which bears little resemblance to the oppressive and repressive state alleged by some of its critics. On the contrary, the clear evidence from the legislation is that, in political terms, this Ireland was a liberal democratic State with individual rights guaranteed, and a well-defined system of parliamentary representation with clear separation of powers and function between the legislature, the executive, the Presidency and the judiciary. Legislation concerning the family, employment, and social organisation was intended to be protective of the individual and the family as defined within the guiding Gaelic Romantic ideology, and, as such, does reflect the social mores and majority opinion of the time. This official and legally established conception of Ireland was freely approved by the people of Ireland at the ballot-box.

Such an Ireland is not “broken and insecure”,¹²¹ as Colm Toibin alleges. Such an Ireland does not greatly suffer in comparison to other nation states, nor is it noticeably exceptional. The idealised Ireland envisioned in its laws and constitution prioritises the community and the family, but also protects its individual citizens. The “imagined community” espoused by its legislation could never be achieved. The real community that emerged was to be very different. In its legislation, the State explicitly pledged equality for women and determinedly refused to establish the Catholic Church as the State religion. In its reality, women found that society

¹²¹ Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', 45.

pressured them to conform to a restricted role, and the Catholic Church seemed to interfere in every aspect of living.

Chapter Two:

The Reality of Irish Society - and its novels

I should almost go as far as to say that without
the concept of a normal society – the novel is impossible. ¹

Frank O'Connor

Across the Western world, the three decades before Ireland's independence were remarkable for the energy that drove social and cultural change. Dublin of the 1900s was immersed in this spirit of intellectual passion and optimism, driven particularly by the infectious excitement of imagining and then creating a new national identity. Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, a founding actress-member of the Irish National Theatre Society, recalls a vibrant society:

Everyone was discussing literature and the arts, the new literature that was emerging. Everywhere, in the streets, at ceilidhes and national concerts, anywhere that crowds gathered, one met enthusiasts, young people drawn from every side of the city's life, leaders or followers of all the little clubs and societies that were appearing every day.²

Yet, despite this intellectual energy, despite establishing a fully-functioning administration, subject to the rule of law with a sophisticated constitution of checks and balances, Irish post-independence society is depicted as "acquisitive, bourgeois,

¹ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (1963) (Hoboken N.J.: Melville House, 2004), 17.

² Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, in Edward Kenny (ed.), *The Splendid Years; Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., 1955), 3-4.

unsophisticated, intellectually conservative and unadventurous",³ and "often bigoted, intolerant, cowardly, philistine and spiritually crippled."⁴

F.S.L.Lyons claimed that creative artists such as Austin Clarke and Patrick Kavanagh "found themselves frequently in conflict with the restrictive and stifling society in which they had to work and from which, for a time at least, they tried to escape."⁵ Lyons failed to dismiss, "the facile distinction between the progressive, industrial north-east and the rest of lazy, backward, rural Ireland."⁶ Dermot Bolger characterised Irish society as being marked by "inward-looking stagnation."⁷ John McGahern adds: "I think of the novel as the most social of all the art forms, the most closely linked to an idea of society, a shared leisure and a system of manners."⁸ If Ireland did not have O'Connor's "normal society", perhaps novel-writing may have been impossible. The received image of "darkness, repression and backwardness"⁹ needs re-assessment, for, as Brian Fallon argues, the "demonization – there is hardly any other suitable word for it," of the 1930s to the 1960s "is still almost automatic

³ Séan O'Faoláin, 'Ireland After Yeats', *The Bell*, Vol. XVII, No. 3 (June 1952), 56.

⁴ John McGahern, quoted in Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk along the Irish Border* (London: Picador, 2001), 79.

⁵ F.S.L.Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 171

⁶ Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy*, 174.

⁷ Dermot Bolger, 'Introduction' in Dermot Bolger (ed.), *The Picador Book of Irish Contemporary Fiction* (London: Picador, 1993), viii.

⁸ John McGahern, *Love of the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 212.

⁹ Desmond Fennell, 'The Recent Birth and Checkered History of "Rural Ireland"', *New Hibernia Review*, Vol.1, No.4 (Winter 1997), 13.

and unquestioning, amounting to what used to be called a conditioned reflex.”¹⁰ The “demonization” needs to be justified or rejected by consideration of the historical evidence about Irish society during these four decades.

During these years, Ireland was affected by the same cultural changes as elsewhere. Underpinning the changes in everyday life everywhere in Western civilisation was the advancement of science:

There were new discoveries of great importance, and every phase of life – health, food, transportation, industry, agriculture, education, philosophy, religion – were increasingly affected by the impact of science. Scientific research became firmly established in universities and as an adjunct of business enterprises. Scientific knowledge (of greater or less accuracy) was spread among the masses by schools, books, lecturers, and newspapers. The physical conditions and the intellectual climate of European life were increasingly shaped by the march of science.¹¹

Following recognition that the theory of evolution was a credible explanation of the origins of man, scientists applied the principles of speculation, observation and experiment to other fields of knowledge. The principle was to seek rational explanations that could be ratified by the human senses without the need for any belief in spiritual or supra-human interventions. As Harriss argues, in the “modern” societies being created in the ferment at the dawn of the twentieth century,

¹⁰ Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 3.

¹¹ Carlton Hayes, et al.(eds.), *History of Europe* (New York: MacMillan:1956), 864.

“authority is bound by laws which are the outcome of thought by people, not by sacred texts which are taken to be the word of God.”¹²

Kathleen Coyle, the now largely forgotten Irish novelist, in her *A Flock of Birds* (1930), an intense, tightly-written and affecting study of a mother’s anguish as she faces the execution of her son, notes the impact of such an agnostic upbringing. The mother, Catherine Munster, determinedly holds her emotions in check as she visits her son on his last morning. Though a non-believer herself, she calls into a Church, and later tells him, “I did not pray. I could not, but I had a strange calmness there, Christy.” She explains this comforting but aberrant behaviour to herself as much as to Christy:

I think we have, perhaps, been too reserved about religion. I was a child, Christy, at a time when the scientific mind was beginning to rise for a great flight. Anything that could be regarded as superstitious was scoffed at. Saints were on the same plane as wizards.¹³

Catherine’s upbringing has helped her cope with the crisis by training her to be detached and rational, but at the cost of emotional warmth. Unquestioning adherence to ideas has made Catherine emotionally cold, and has made Christy an executed revolutionary. Coyle’s family tragedy mirrors the clash of ideas – modernity/tradition, natural/supernatural, and religion/secularism – that were to mark the early twentieth century. At the last, both she and Christy gain comfort and

¹² John Harriss (ed.), *The Family: A Social History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10.

¹³ Kathleen Coyle, *A Flock of Birds* (1930) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1995), 113.

resolve by admitting that other possibilities exist. The novel inspires sympathy because it does not judge, but rather explores.

The questioning of fundamental beliefs was a challenge to the leadership elites of governments and of organised religion. Europe had already provided examples of the changes that humanism could implement. Donal Barrington, in explaining why the Catholic Church in Ireland so determinedly sought to be a State Church, argues:

The French Parliament attempted to abolish religion completely from public life. It secularized education, placed all hospitals under the care of laymen, removed the motto *Dieu protège la France* from the coinage, introduced divorce, expelled religious orders, subjected priests to military service, separated the Church from the State, denied to the Church its sacred character, and attempted to reduce it to the rank of a voluntary association.¹⁴

Gabriel Daly explains how the Catholic Church responded: "It gathered its wagons into a tight circle and proclaimed modernity in all its forms to be the enemy. The papacy set out to crush any attempt by Catholic scholars to enter into dialogue with modern culture."¹⁵ To compound the confessional pressure on the government, the fledgling Irish State began to formulate its policies and to develop its institutions in

¹⁴ Donal Barrington, 'Article Forty-Four. Church and State', *The Irish Monthly*, Vol.81, No. 953 (Jan., 1953), 1-2.

¹⁵ Gabriel Daly, 'Liberal Democracy, Crisis and the Christian Vision', in Denis Carroll (ed.), *Religion in Ireland: Past, Present and Future* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1999), 146.

the very decades in which two authoritarian popes, Pius XI (1922-1939) and Pius XII (1939-1958), were to “scale new heights of centralised certitude.”¹⁶

The result for Irish society was the continuation of a conservative culture justified as a safeguard against the threat to cherished beliefs. For Irish literature, informal and, later, legislated censorship was to result. The determination to create a State clearly differentiated from Britain by its Gaelic and Catholic traditions coincided with an international movement to actively promote Catholic culture and social beliefs following the call of Pope Pius XI in 1922 for worldwide ‘Catholic Action’.¹⁷ This drive was motivated by fear of modernity in all its forms. Catholic Action gave justification to the words and deeds of the Catholic hierarchy, clergy and lay-activists. In Ireland their fears led to a conservative attitude to family life – low and late marriage rates, celibacy, restraints on sexuality, especially contraception, and a restricted role for women. In social and personal life Catholic Action obsessions led to attacks on books and publications, the cinema, dancing, forms of dress, woman/man friendships and relationships. For many of independent Ireland’s citizens at the time, particularly members of religious voluntary societies and sodalities, and traditionalists in town and country, this was not a repressive, imposed regime – this was the means towards a shared imagining of the Ireland they desired.

¹⁶ John Cooney, *The Crozier & the Dáil* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1986), 13.

¹⁷ Donal Ó Drisceoil, ‘A Dark Chapter. Censorship and the Irish Writer’, in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Volume V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 288.

For some Irish novelists, it was irrational to argue that developments elsewhere were not applicable in Ireland. Faced with a culture of supernaturalism, some responded with naturalist novels, which excluded God and concentrated rather on the poorer aspects of life. Bradbury denotes the essence of the naturalist novel:

It perceived the age of the mass, the machine, the crowded and inhuman city; it looked at the ghettos, the age of commodities, rising department stores, the industrial conditions of workers, the visible aspects and processes of the modern itself. It claimed scientific rationality rather than religious or moral wisdom; it was the art of the direct, the frank, the free, the contemporary – the modern itself.¹⁸

Such modernity produces a society in which the idea of a distinction between the ‘individual’ and ‘society’ becomes thinkable. Harriss argues that in the past, “individual human beings knew themselves essentially as members of social groups, probably based on kinship and neighbourhood. In modern society individuals are, as it were, separated out from, and are no longer defined in terms of, particular social relations.”¹⁹

Fox’s assertion that “the novel deals with the individual, it is the epic of the struggle of the individual against society,”²⁰ could explain the dearth of critically-acclaimed nineteenth-century Irish novels, given that they were often concerned with society’s group struggles – family or community or tenantry – rather than with

¹⁸ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 21-22.

¹⁹ Harriss (ed.), *The Family*, 9.

²⁰ Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 44.

a discrete individual.²¹ As independent Ireland's novelists began to narrate their characters' personal struggles, they were narrating a revolutionary change from the group focus to the individual focus. Irish society would inevitably defend its own traditional values, which were based on the primacy of the group over the individual. Critical attacks by traditional Irish society on the novels were attacks on modernity. Critical attacks by the novels on Irish society were attacks on tradition. Benedict Kiely makes the point that, in relation to the society in which he was reared, "a writer may as readily be an apostate as an apostle."²² It is the depictions by the apostates, such novelists as Liam O'Flaherty, Séan O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor, of a society requiring revolutionary reform that has survived, rather than the more sympathetic portrayals by the apostles of a traditional Ireland merely requiring evolutionary development, as, for example, in the novels of Peadar O'Donnell, Francis MacManus and Maura Laverty.

Development did happen. The dramatic transformation in Irish life, culture and economy in the 1960s and after may obscure the evolutionary changes that occurred more steadily within Ireland's societies during the four decades from 1922. The society in 1922 had just emerged from post-World War, post-War of Independence and post-Civil War and was very different to the more confident state

²¹ W.J. McCormack, *Sheridan, Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 250. Joe Cleary, 'The nineteenth-century Irish novel: notes and speculations on literary historiography', in Jacqueline Belanger (ed.), *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 203; Thomas Flanagan, *The Irish Novelists 1800-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 35.

²² Benedict Kiely, *Modern Irish Fiction: A Critique* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950), 137.

that was established during the 1930s, and survived to the Emergency of the 1940s and the harsh post-war economic difficulties of the 1950s. There could not be one 'Irish society' between 1922 and the 1960s because, throughout the period, Ireland was in constant incremental development in its laws, economy, structures, attitudes and values. The novels that explored and exposed this society needed to change with it. Not all did. The Ireland that they narrated was often unchanging. Four decades after independence, Augustine Martin pointed out:

The writer has consistently chastised his society for being lifeless, inert and complacent. Is it possible that the writer may himself have fallen victim to these very vices in being satisfied with outmoded stereotypes of a society which has, in the meantime, shaken off its lethargy and moved forward unnoticed by its literary chroniclers?

With justification, Martin asks, "Is it a true image?" and "Has the image itself become moribund?"²³ With hindsight, the evidence suggests that the image was indeed moribund. Ireland in the 1960s was very different to the Ireland of 1922. Yet the bleakness and the hopelessness of the life portrayed by John McGahern in *The Barracks* (1963) or *The Dark* (1965) or John Broderick in *The Pilgrimage* (1962) is little different to that of Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (1925) or *The Assassin* (1928).

Various factors affected Irish society across the first four decades of independence. There was an inevitable tension between constitutional theory and opportunities to convert its social provisions into action. The state of the economy was the key constraint that affected the whole period. The economy prevented the

²³ Augustine Martin, 'Inherited Dissent. The Dilemma of the Irish Writer', *Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 213 (Spring 1965), 2.

government from improving in substantial ways the quality of life for the majority of its citizens. Governments provided meagre support for the most vulnerable, but even by 1945 one commentator could report that “we may take it that there are some 90-100,000 men, women and children in the country who are safeguarded from starvation, but who have not enough – in many cases not nearly enough – money to procure the simple necessities of life.”²⁴

There were within the Irish polity a number of general groupings within which people shared some common characteristics, particularly in their living conditions, and between which there were manifest disparities in wealth and lifestyle. The extent of economic and social difference in Ireland after 40 years of independence is reflected in the 1966 estimate that found that 65% of the population possessed no capital, while 5% accounted for more than 70% of the nation’s wealth.²⁵ Catholic wealth possession in Ireland was long established. De Beaumont in his survey published in 1835 found:

Catholic commerce flourishing in all Ireland, but especially in the large towns such as Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Galway, has already produced immense capitals. One single fact may suffice to show its importance and prosperity, namely that in 1829 nine-tenths of the funds of the bank of Ireland belonged to Catholic proprietors.²⁶

²⁴ Professor T.W.T. Dillon, ‘The Social Services in Eire’, *Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 135 (September 1945), 329.

²⁵ Patrick M. Lyons, ‘The Distribution of Personal Wealth’, in A.L.Tait and J.A. Bristow (eds.), *Ireland: Some Problems of a Developing Economy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), 168.

²⁶ Gustave de Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political and Religious* (1839) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 249.

This wealthy Catholic middle class had developed a communal self-awareness which enabled them to exercise political influence, for example in the campaign for Catholic emancipation. As a pressure group, they were less motivated by achieving national independence than achieving Catholic civil and political equality with their entrenched Anglo-Irish and Protestant wealth equivalents.

Discussion about social classes in rural Ireland can be complicated by terms, especially the use of 'peasant', much used in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. In economic analysis, the peasantry work small amounts of agricultural land which they own. Prior to the Land Acts from 1869-1903, there were 3% smallholders and 97% tenants; by 1929 there were 2.6% tenants and 97.4% smallholders.²⁷ Benedict Kiely explains the problem of terminology by quoting from Seumas O'Kelly's *Wet Clay*, in which a young American farmer visits his Irish grandmother and his cousin in the post-Land War period as families began to finally take ownership of their fields. Grandmother tells the young American that with all his schooling he should have become a priest. He replies that he had no vocation, and so had followed his blood and become a peasant:

"A what?" the old woman asked.

"A peasant – we're all peasants, are we not?"

"Faith, I never knew that until you came across the ocean to tell us," the old woman said.

²⁷ Richard Dunphy, 'Fianna Fáil and the Working Class, 1926-1938', in Donal Ó'Driscóil and Fintan Lane (eds.), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 254.

The Irish cousin explains that when the American says 'peasant' he really means 'farmer', and then tells him, "We never call ourselves peasants. It was always The People. Take the wording of our ritual: 'The Land for the People.' 'The Peoples Rights.' 'Clear the Ranches of the Cattle; Make Room for the People.'" The cousin concludes, "we only allowed that we were peasants when we were noble, bold, or better still, proprietors."²⁸ Despite the term never being used by the people themselves, writers used 'peasant' in Irish literature to mean all rural working people.

Objective assessment of rural living has been complicated by a mythologized West, "an idealised landscape, populated by an idealised people who invoke the representative, exclusive essence of the nation through their Otherness from Britain"²⁹. Ireland is not alone in this, for, as Luke Gibbons points out:

The invocation of the west as the source of heroism, mystery and romance goes back at least to antiquity, and is found in many different cultures under such varied names as Atlantis, Elysium, El Dorado or the English Land of Cockaigne. In modern times, however, Ireland and the United States would seem to be the outstanding examples of countries in which the myth of the west has been elevated to a national ideal.³⁰

Gibbons suggests that one crucial difference between the American and the Irish conceptions is that in the former "it is the community that needs the individual, the

²⁸ Seumas O'Kelly. Quoted in Kiely, *Modern Irish Fiction*, 24.

²⁹ Brian Graham, 'Ireland and Irishness. Place, culture and identity', in Brian Graham (ed.), *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (Oxford: Routledge, 1997), 7.

³⁰ Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 23.

hero", while in the latter "the individual needs the community."³¹ The West as portrayed has come to represent all of rural Ireland regardless of facts of history, geology and geography. Such portrayals are not exclusive to Ireland. Graham points out: "such renditions of place are fundamental to a European tradition of oversimplifying space into idealised constructs of tradition and modernity. Thus there is little that is conceptually exceptional about the construction of Irish nationalism."³²

Hirsch points out that "The rural figures delineated by major Irish authors were so compelling that some readers and critics have mistakenly considered them real or historically accurate."³³ The novelists after independence, for example, Flann O'Brien, Liam O'Flaherty and Patrick Kavanagh, were motivated to overturn any 'noble peasant' myths. Liam O'Dowd summarises:

They sought to confront abstractions such as 'the Catholic Mind, the Irish Mind, and the Gaelic Mind' with fictional and direct accounts of alternative realities. The latter included the conditions of the Dublin and Belfast working class, islanders, fishermen, emigrants and seasonal migrants and women, groups who were idealised, marginalised or ignored in the dominant orthodoxies.³⁴

Writers' characterisations differed little as they re-imagined their peasantry – Joyce's old man with "redrimmed horny eyes" with whom he "must struggle all through

³¹ Gibbons, *Transformations*, 31.

³² Graham, 'Ireland and Irishness', 7.

³³ Edward Hirsch, 'The Imaginary Irish Peasant', *PMLA*, Vol.106, No.5 (October, 1991), 1117.

³⁴Liam O'Dowd, 'Neglecting the Material Dimension. Irish intellectuals and the problem of identity', *Irish Review*, Vol. 3. (1988), 12.

this night",³⁵ Flann O'Brien's "old, crooked stooped fellow" whose "hairless part of his face was brown, tough and wrinkled like leather",³⁶ Liam O'Flaherty's "man in the prime of life" whose "thick, moist lips curved outwards" and whose "nose was like that of a prize fighter, being short, thick and flattened at the end",³⁷ or Frank O'Connor's "Gnarled, wild, with turbulent faces" who were wearing "black sombreros and carrying big sticks"³⁸ – all had the common fault of implying a single undifferentiated entity, 'the peasants'. A personal reaction to these created images is demonstrated by Seán O'Faoláin in a letter to Edward Garnett reacting to comments about Parnell. In a tongue-in-cheek tirade O'Faoláin writes:

But you owe me an apology – if I read your letter aright. I "look at P. through the eyes of a peasant"? *I* and *peasant* in the one sentence!! My God, am I a peasant? Do I look like a peasant, think or talk like one! I should drown myself to think so! I beg of you to understand that my father & mother tore the soil with their hands but I have torn myself out of their blighted, blinded, uncivilised, intolerant, shutminded tradition at no small cost to my nature and my immortal soul and will not be spoken of in the same breath with that loathsome tradition now. Have I not warned you I am an Anglo-Irishman now? I believe you did it to hurt my feelings!³⁹

For a novelist like O'Faoláin, 'peasantry' was problematic, for inherent in these conceptions of a 'folk entity' was the implication that 'individuals' – the creation of

³⁵James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) (London: Penguin, 1996), 287.

³⁶ Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth* (1941) (London: Flamingo, 1993), 14.

³⁷ Liam O'Flaherty, *Skerrett* (1932) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1993), 6.

³⁸ Frank O'Connor, 'In the Train', *The Stories of Frank O'Connor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), 165.

³⁹ Seán O'Faoláin, letter to Edward Garnett, *Edward Garnett Papers*, Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas at Austin.

modernity and the subject of novels – lived in cities, while the ‘peasantry’ – a grouping, not individuated – lived in the country. Critics who accepted as true that Irish country people formed a group-think entity, rather than a group of individuals, could well conclude that such an amorphous society could not sustain the individual/society tension necessary for successful novel-writing. However, such an argument fails because the belief that Irish rural society was unstructured is false. The belief arises partly because the range of Irish classes was dramatically compressed when the Famine, and the subsequent agricultural changes, removed the whole bottom section of the class structure. One quarter of the population, the families of landless labourers and the cottiers, was eliminated by death and emigration, and slow demise in the slums of cities.⁴⁰

Sensitivity to the status granted by land ownership is narrated in a whole range of novels. Francis MacManus provides an acute depiction of land-hunger, greed, and the power of status in his *This House was Mine* (1937).⁴¹ In it, simple snobbery represents a much deeper assumption of superiority. As the family leave the funeral of Martin’s wife, his son John greets their neighbours’ daughter:

John shook her hand warmly. My father shot a glance at me. I thought then he was just being cranky. I know now that he was not. It was only for a moment that she and my son met and spoke. Only a minute! There was seed sown.

⁴⁰ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine 1798-1848* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), 204-206.

⁴¹ Francis MacManus, *This House was Mine* (1937) (Cork: Mercier, 1963).

‘I hope he doesn’t offer her a lift home,’ my father said, ‘considering the day that is in it.’ He meant that it wouldn’t look well for the Hickeys to ride home from a family funeral with their labourer’s daughter sitting up beside them.

The grandfather, Michael, is satisfied that, “The girl knows her place and time.”

Michael then sums up the whole story, and the universal message of the novel: ‘I know my mind and what’s right,’ he barked.⁴² He certainly knows his mind, but he is not right, and the irony heightens the moment.

The events of the novel are recounted retrospectively by Martin Hickey who returns to a now-ruined farmhouse. The impact of the snobbish behaviours that will be narrated is the more poignant knowing what was built laboriously over generations has been destroyed by personal arrogance in months. The central issues are greed, land acquisition and pride in family reputation, all bound up in the character of Michael. The mood and the events, the sickness and death of mother Nell, the abuse towards the servant Judy, are dark, preparing for the calamities to come. The minor examples of callous behaviours by Michael, accepted by the servile Martin, aggregate so that no sympathy remains at their downfall. MacManus has written a compact and vivid novel that tells an individual story while illustrating a universal problem – how, without humility, certainties close the mind and irreconcilable certainties inevitably destroy. *This House was Mine* narrates the clash of ideas between the traditional diehards and the would-be modernisers in newly-independent Ireland. Obsession with status destroyed Michael Hickey’s family. It

⁴² MacManus, *This House was Mine*, 31.

was confidence in their status that defined the middle-class, a category recognised for its level of education, the quality and location of residence, occupation, for example as shop-owner or publican, professional standing, or being a commercial or industrial manager, organising – but certainly not doing – manual labour. Class, gender and religious affiliation were the major factors affecting the quality of living in post-independence Ireland.

Critics claim that the novel is closely correlated with a strong middle-class, and only works successfully within a stratified society.⁴³ Declan Kiberd notes, “the form of the novel presupposes a made society: Ireland’s was a society in the making.”⁴⁴ The assertion is then made that Ireland did not have a stratified society, as, for example, when Seán O’Faoláin claims that Ireland changed “from a stratified society – ranging from aristocrat to outcast – to a one-class society, where there are not native aristocrats (except the writers?).”⁴⁵ This was not so. Sociologist Michel Peillon argued more than thirty-five years ago that, “There is strictly no Irish middle class, as such, though to assume its existence has some usefulness.”⁴⁶ Gray, in his survey of Ireland in 1966, argued that there was an “almost total lack of a class structure in Ireland” – a matter he found so obvious that he presents no evidence for

⁴³ For example, Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 49-51; Fox, *The Novel and the People*, 42.

⁴⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), 556.

⁴⁵ Seán O’Faoláin, ‘Fifty Years of Irish Writing’, *Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 201 (Spring 1962), 103.

⁴⁶ Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1982), 28.

his view.⁴⁷ Ulick O'Connor took a lofty approach as he agreed with these sentiments arguing that in Ireland "we have an aristocracy of personality. There is a kind of classlessness in Irish society because we are more interested in a man's mind and personality than his title or income."⁴⁸

The denial of a class structure in the face of daily evidence is, amongst other things, a monument to the political skills of Fianna Fáil. The new party formed in 1926 had a core support of middling and small farmers. In order to attract electoral support from the working class, not the immediate beneficiaries of their political policies, they adopted a populist approach. Political populism "seeks to mobilise people regardless of class by denying the existence of class and of any class-based ideology. Populism tries to mobilise all interests under a single conception of the national interest."⁴⁹ Fianna Fáil politicians reiterated the mantra of the 'classless society', as if it was valid. C.S. Andrews in his influential memoir *Man of No Property* argued that as far as Republicans were concerned: "We assumed that except for the usual tendency of tuppence-halfpenny to look down on tuppence the Irish nation in the mass was a classless society. There was no social immobility based on birth or inherited wealth."⁵⁰ However, his memoir records the clear opposite, the marked

⁴⁷ Tony Gray, *The Irish Answer - An Anatomy of Modern Ireland* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 352.

⁴⁸ Ulick O'Connor, quoted in Tony Farman, *Privileged Lives. A Social History of Middle Class Ireland. 1882-1989* (Dublin: A & A Farman, 2010), 193.

⁴⁹ Brian Smith, quoted in Richard Dunphy, 'Fianna Fáil and the Working Class', 247.

⁵⁰ C.S. Andrews, *Man of No Property* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1982), 13.

differences in housing, leisure activities, possessions and education between various gradations of the Catholic middle classes. He then records the shocking conditions endured by many of the working class. Despite the evidence of extreme social inequalities, of both rural and urban poverty, in 1969 David Andrews, Fianna Fáil minister and son of C.S., claimed that “we are as near to being a classless society as any country in Western Europe and we hope to keep it that way.”⁵¹ It was not so. A deep-rooted and rigid class structure existed throughout the first four decades of Ireland’s independence.

The presence of an affluent middle-class, certainly in Dublin at least, is suggested by the fact that in 1937 as many as 10,000 new motor vehicles were officially registered, and 100,000 radio-licences were issued.⁵² Humphreys in his survey of ‘New Dubliners’ at the beginning of the 1960s, records that “people are competing to outstrip each other in the external symbols of class, such as cars, clothes, ‘and even prams’, and the reports of the social distinctions that are made on the basis of rather small occupational differences in the trades and the professions – all these are evidence of a strong continuing class consciousness.”⁵³ Class difference in town and country was made abundantly clear by the location, size, condition and

⁵¹ D. Andrews, quoted in *The Irish Times* (30.05.1969), 8.

⁵² Louise Ryan, ‘Constructing “Irishwoman”; Modern Girls and Comely Maidens’, *Irish Studies Review*, Vol.6, No. 3 (1998), 264.

⁵³ Alexander J. Humphreys, *New Dubliners. Urbanisation and the Irish Family* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 196.

material comforts of the dwelling-place. Small towns and some villages had some substantial block-stone houses occupied by the priest, rector, doctor and established tradesmen, while the poorer classes dwelt in unhewn-stone cottages similar to the cottages of smallholders in the surrounding area. Overcrowding was endemic in many rural counties.⁵⁴ The Fianna Fáil government were sympathetic to the housing needs of the small farmers, their core constituency of supporters. However, local authorities, dominated by the middling and larger farmers as ratepayers, were reluctant to invest, though, following the Housing Act (1932), over 10,000 cottages were built in a decade for small farmers by providing mortgages of up to 90%. The Labourers' Act (1936) enabled any rural person who worked for hire to buy their cottage, with its acre or half-acre, and many did.⁵⁵

Amenities were few. Even by 1946, only one farmhouse in five had any form of toilet. Water was carried from the well, and there was no electricity except in the major towns. Turf was the main fuel for both heating and cooking. As cooking was on an open hearth, the atmosphere was smoky which, with the small windows, made for dark interiors.⁵⁶ Reading in the evenings was extremely difficult by light of candle or oil-lamp. The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) in 1947 did start the potential

⁵⁴ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 73.

⁵⁵ Anne-Marie Walsh, 'Root them in the land: cottage schemes for agricultural labourers', in Joost Augusteyn (ed.), *Ireland in the 1930s* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 52.

⁵⁶ Jenny Beale, *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* (London: MacMillan, 1986), 21.

for change through the rural electrification campaign. In 1946 while most urban houses were connected to the electricity supply, very few rural houses had such access. By 1956 over half rural houses had connections to the supply. The supply of piped water proved more difficult. In 1961, 97% of urban houses had running water, while only 3% of rural houses were connected to a public water supply, though about 12% did have water piped from their well or roof tank.⁵⁷

Arensberg and Kimball describe farming households in the 1930s in which male and female roles are clearly defined, and distinct.⁵⁸ The man worked the land – tilling the fields, haymaking, harvesting cereal crops, cutting and drawing the turf and, if near the coast, fishing. The woman looked after the children, prepared and cooked the food, and provided clothing. On smallholdings she also kept poultry, possibly pigs, and she milked the cow, and did any dairying of butter and cheese. With changes in farming across these four decades, these subsistence activities tended to be replaced by an increase in domestic work. This increase in domesticity increased the woman's authority. While her farming activities were generally controlled by the man, the emphasis on improving housing and living conditions with its related social status, resulted in the man becoming more dependent on the

⁵⁷ Mary Daly, "'Turn on the Tap': The State, Irish Women and Running Water", in Maryann Valiulis and Mary Dowd (eds.), *Women in Irish History* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), 206-207.

⁵⁸ Conrad M. Arensberg and Solan T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940), 35-45.

woman's domestic skills.⁵⁹ Tom Inglis argues "Irish women began to transform the confined space in which they operated from what was in reality an animal house to a modern, civilised home. It was from within the home that the practices central to the modernization of agriculture, i.e. postponed marriage, permanent celibacy, and emigration, were developed."⁶⁰

Electricity enabled women to acquire labour-saving devices, though the spread of labour-saving household gadgets did not necessarily bring a reduction in housework. Sealed floors demanded cleaning more often than dirt floors, and more household goods – furniture, floor coverings, kitchen implements – needed more cleaning and maintenance. Even replacing open fires and pot ovens with ranges meant more cleaning, and more elaborate cooking and baking.⁶¹ Steadily farm income rose with the amalgamation of small farms as people moved away from the countryside, and more consumer goods could be desired and acquired. Beale points out:

This process was facilitated by the introduction of mass media into the countryside. During the 1950s radios became commonplace, and television rural life and advertisements for the latest consumer goods into remote rural kitchens. The isolation of the countryside was gone.⁶²

⁵⁹Clare Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family: Recent Feminist Work in Irish Cultural Studies', *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 15. No. 1 (2000), 45.

⁶⁰Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly. The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: UCD press, 1998), 197.

⁶¹ Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Economic Change and Housework in Ireland 1890-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 213; and Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family', 43.

⁶² Beale, *Women in Ireland*, 42.

In the cities “housing was too dear for the poor.”⁶³ Kearns chronicles, “By the 1930s Dublin’s dilapidated tenements were deemed ‘the worst slums in Europe’. The decline of Georgian Dublin from elegant abodes of the aristocracy to ‘human piggeries’ is one of Dublin’s saddest sagas.”⁶⁴ The Housing Act (1924) had encouraged private investment in housing and had led to middle-class housing being built in expanding suburbs on the city fringe. Following the Housing Act (1932), “an average of 12,000 houses a year were built with state aid between 1932 and 1942.”⁶⁵ Whilst promoting middle-class housing, the Housing Act (1932) did provide financial aid for slum clearance in the hope of eradicating the diseases that flourished in the cramped and insanitary conditions. Despite the government’s intention to reduce this dire situation, a housing report in 1938 revealed that in Dublin there were 64,940 people living in tenements and cottages condemned as ‘unfit for human occupation’.⁶⁶

Kearns’ oral history of tenement life leads him to conclude that “tenement dwellers had their own social milieu, forged a unique ethos, and developed a remarkably cohesive community rich and complex in its customs, traditions,

⁶³ J.J.Lee, *Ireland 1885-1985. Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 123.

⁶⁴ Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin Tenement Life. An Oral History* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1994), 1.

⁶⁵ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 193.

⁶⁶ T.W.T.Dillon, ‘Slum Clearance: Past and Future’, *Studies*, Vol.34, No. 133 (May, 1945), 14.

neighbouring patterns, survival techniques and urban folklore.”⁶⁷ This ‘cohesive community’ is not the impression of Dublin slum-dwellers portrayed in O’Flaherty’s *The Informer* or *Insurrection*. The informer, Gypo Nolan, intoxicated both by alcohol and the excitement of his act of betrayal, finds a ready tenement mob for his moments of false glory:

Gypo strode in front of the disreputable throng as proud as a king leading his courtiers. They came after him with pattering feet, panting, pushing, snivelling, emitting that variegated murmur of sound that comes from a pack of wild things in a panic, coming from afar, unseen, without a guiding reason. They were the riff-raff and the jetsam of the slums, the most degraded types of those who dwell in the crowded warrens on either bank of the Liffey.⁶⁸

This accumulation of animal imagery dehumanises the people, and adds to the atmosphere of unthinking chaos as Gypo abandons any pretence of reason. Later, as Gypo flees having accepted his guilt, some reflection occurs, and the imagery implies some sympathy with the people’s plight:

It was the slum district which he knew so well, the district that enclosed Titt Street, the brothels, the Bogey Hole, tenement house, churches, pawnshops, public-houses, ruins, filth, crime, beautiful women, resplendent idealism in damp cellars, saints starving in garrets, the most lurid examples of debauchery and vice, all living thigh to thigh, breast to breast, in that foetid morass on the north bank of the Liffey.⁶⁹

In a sentence O’Flaherty encapsulates the reality. His writing moves in a crescendo of feeling from simply listing places, through what these places do to people and

⁶⁷ Kearns, *Dublin Tenement Life*, 23.

⁶⁸ O’Flaherty, *The Informer* (1925) (London: New English Library, 1980), 82.

⁶⁹ O’Flaherty, *The Informer*, 169.

ending in a cry of anger – “that foetid morass”. O’Flaherty’s depiction confirms another of Kearns’ conclusions: “Daily tenement life also demanded coping with the hard realities of personal conflict, alcoholism, wife abuse, animal gangs, prostitution and suicide.”⁷⁰

These living conditions in town and country did not arise with independence. Society’s accepted norms and mores, and the living patterns that prevailed into the Irish Free State in 1922, had their origins in the aftermath of the Great Famine, some seventy-five years before. The immediate impact was the starvation to death of at least 800,000 Irish people, the emigration of hundreds of thousands more, such that the population declined by 2,250,000.⁷¹ In the decade 1845-1855 the vast majority of the two million Irish who died or emigrated were the unskilled rural working class.⁷² This national trauma wrought fundamental changes in Irish economic, social and ideological life. Post-famine social life was to become obsessed with land, the family and the Church. The production from the land available restricted the type of family that could be sustained, and the Church became the enforcer of the new family model. Following the Land Purchase Acts, Ireland became a land of smallholders with a devastating impact on family life and on individuals. Now a stem system became the norm for a very substantial proportion of the rural population, though

⁷⁰ Kearns. *Dublin Tenement Life*, 23.

⁷¹ Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine*, 204.

⁷² Fintan Lane, ‘Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland’ in Ó’Drisceoil and Lane (eds.), *Politics and the Irish Working Class*, 117.

with many exceptions and variations depending on the specific circumstances in each family.⁷³ Within the stem system one favoured son was chosen to inherit the land and one daughter provided with a marriage dowry. With few opportunities for employment locally for the remaining siblings, exclusion from favour meant little prospect of marriage and their own family life.

Attachment to the status and deference given by land-holding meant many farmers were reluctant to retire. Fathers often delayed naming the chosen heir to keep some other sons at home as cheap labour. Each hoped that they would inherit, but in their middle age when not chosen, they were in no position to marry and often had lost the energy to emigrate. They settled into a restricted life as the bachelor brother, the 'assisting relative' in the kitchen corner. This meant delayed marriage even for the inheriting son. In 1946, the average age of a marrying farmer was nearly 37, with his wife nearly 30, and this was evidence of a falling marriage age.⁷⁴ While these chosen off-spring were provided some security by land and marriage, there were potential disadvantages. They had to stay on the land, giving up opportunities of other careers and other employment elsewhere. They remained in this economically-depressed traditional rural culture - and they had to live with and care for, elderly parents. Indeed, Arensberg and Kimble record that the greatest

⁷³ P.Gibbon, and C. Curtin, 'The Stem Family in Ireland', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July 1978), 445.

⁷⁴ Mary Daly, 'Women and Land: The Historical Dimension', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 7 (January 1997), 120.

domestic strife was that between the incoming daughter-in-law and the aging mother-in law, who feared losing her son's affection to this younger rival, and, worse, losing her fiefdom of hearth, kitchen and yard.⁷⁵ The younger woman has to cope with this constant conflict, knowing that her future is to be the carer for her husband's ageing parents. As Rudd drily points out, "Young Irish girls were not totally enamoured with this system of marriage."⁷⁶

Some conflict between the generations was, perhaps, inevitable. Such conflict was multiplied when differences of ways of life, upbringings and community stories complicated the marriage. Peadar O'Donnell's *The Big Windows*⁷⁷ has his usual shrewd observation of country people and their actions, while exploring and narrating why they are as they are. The story is simple. Tom Manus brings to his mainland glen home and to his widowed mother, Mary, his island wife Brigid Dugan. The twist is that Brigid is welcomed by Mary from the start but rejected by most of her neighbours. The novel is then concerned with why the stranger should be so feared and how this conflict could be resolved. Brigid's island and Tom's glen are only a few miles apart, both part of the Irish West. Yet the impact of place with its spirit, traditions and stories have created people with quite contradictory outlooks. Writing twenty years before *The Big Windows* O'Donnell suggested, "The

⁷⁵Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community*, 122-123.

⁷⁶ Joy Rudd, 'Invisible Exports: The Emigration of Irish Women this Century', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.11, No.4 (1988), 308.

⁷⁷ Peadar O'Donnell, *The Big Windows* (1955) (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1985).

Anglo-Irish school of writers is passing. We are just on the edge of a period when Irish life will find its way into literature, written in English, but of Ireland for Ireland by Irish writers.”⁷⁸ *The Big Windows* is an effective example of such a literature. The novel’s realistic depiction of tasks of daily living, of the social behaviours within the community and of the celebrations and the confrontations, with its emphasis on local terminology, firmly locates it in the Irish West. The wide cast of characters share general community attitudes but are all clearly individuated and credible. The central figure of Brigid links the action which is chronological, but the other characters are used to represent the many different values and behaviours that together form the local culture. These are characters content within a community, not fighting against it. The events of the story are wide-ranging, interesting and informative, and the pace is brisk. However, the ending is abrupt and unsatisfactory in that it contradicts the theme so patiently developed. With the cultural differences fully aired, learning to live together is meaningless when Brigid turns her back and retreats to her own. Tom, increasingly peripheral, is killed in an accident, and Brigid with their child goes home to the island, never to return to the glen. O’Donnell’s intriguing story of a particular community exemplifies a universal need for openness to new ideas and generosity of spirit in living with difference. *The Big Windows* is the positive flip-side of compromise offering hope where MacManus’s *This House was Mine* demonstrates how bigotry brings tragedy.

⁷⁸ Peadar O’Donnell, ‘Young Irish Writers’, *The Commonweal* (April 26, 1933), 717.

While the marrying couple had their difficulties, for the non-inheriting sons and the undowered daughters the economic situation was, at best, insecure. For many men and women, migration from countryside to Irish large towns and cities, and emigration mainly to Britain and the United States, but also to Australia and Canada, was a necessity, but for others it was also a positive choice. Young single women especially took the opportunity to look for a job and start their own family abroad. The surplus of men in Ireland throughout the twentieth century was entirely due to the emigration of women.⁷⁹ At the end of the period in John McGahern's County Leitrim there were 3,415 single women of 15 and over compared to 7,027 single men.⁸⁰ By 1951 rural Ireland contained 868 women for every 1000 men. For women, the disadvantages of remaining in the family home were outweighed by the possibilities offered by migration. Daly summarises:

Although many of the jobs available to women both in Britain and Ireland offered modest pay and few opportunities for career advancement, they provided a measure of personal freedom, a guaranteed weekly wage, and often 'a room of one's own'. When contrasted with uncertain status of an 'assisting relative' living on the family farm, at the beck and call of a parent or brother, without any entitlement to regular pay, a lack of privacy and the uncertainty of waiting for a prospective husband to appear, the appeal of even a poorly-paid position in Birmingham or Dublin becomes obvious.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Rudd, 'Invisible Exports', 307.

⁸⁰ Brendan Walsh, 'Marriage in Ireland in the Twentieth Century', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin: College Press, 1985), 136.

⁸¹ Daly, 'Women and Land', 121.

Social stability demanded celibacy. As Lee has argued, "Sex posed a far more subversive threat than the landlord to the security and status of the family. Boys and girls must be kept apart at all costs."⁸² The Catholic Church emerges like a tyrant because of its single-minded focus on behaviours that threatened the sustainable family model. In 1922 membership of the Catholic Church provided many citizens with their prime sense of identity. The Church was a real and dominant presence, and had been for centuries. Even at the end of the twentieth century, Finola Kennedy could confidently assert, "It is safe to say that a majority of Irish people were born in a Catholic hospital, baptised in a Catholic church, educated in a Catholic school, married in the presence of a Catholic priest and will be buried following a Catholic funeral. From the cradle to the grave the priest is a key figure."⁸³

By the 1930s it was clear that Catholicism was the key identifier of Irish nationalism. As Keogh suggests, "The Eucharistic Congress in 1932 demonstrated the central importance of Catholicism in the celebration of national identity. On that occasion Faith and Fatherland were as one."⁸⁴ To the Catholic populace of the Irish Free State, the Catholic Church's identity with a political Fatherland was important,

⁸² J.J.Lee , 'Women and the Church since the Famine', in Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds.) *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (Dublin: Arlen House, 1978), 39.

⁸³ Finola Kennedy, *Cottage to Creche* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2001), 171.

⁸⁴ Dermot Keogh, 'Church, State and Society' in Brian Farrell(ed.) *De Valera's Constitution and Ours* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), 105.

but Faith in its teachings was fundamental, largely unquestioned and pervasive.

Inglis claims:

We know that there is an ongoing, deep-down, unquestioned attitude or orientation which characterises being Catholic and specifically, being an Irish Catholic. It is an intuitive knowledge of what it is to be Catholic: what kind of things need to be said and done and when and where it is appropriate or necessary to say and do them. This becomes an in-built, automatic way of relating to situations.⁸⁵

Daniel Corkery was concerned about the impact of this pervasive religious atmosphere on fiction writers, asking, "who can name a novel dealing adequately with their religious consciousness?" He reasoned:

Yet this religious consciousness is so vast, so deep, so dramatic, even so terrible a thing, occasionally creating wreckage in its path, tumbling the weak things over, that when one begins to know it, one wonders if it is possible for a writer to deal with any phase of Irish life without trenching upon it.⁸⁶

Martin identifies how a writer's confessional tradition fundamentally affects their art:

One might generalise and say that with the majority of good Irish Roman Catholic writers the religious concern forms much of their working material, while with the majority of Irish Anglicans the religious is either assumed or ignored.⁸⁷

For most novelists from the Catholic tradition the religious concerns were not matters of doctrine, nor of ritual – though wakes and weddings were occasionally

⁸⁵ Tom. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 10.

⁸⁶ Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (1931) (Cork: Mercier Press, 1966), 19-20.

⁸⁷ Augustine Martin, *Bearing Witness. Essays on Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1996), 102.

used for humour or to add some colour and vitality. As novelists they were concerned with the actions of an individual, and so priests often play a central and pivotal role.

Priests used their spiritual and religious authority to try to impose a social ideology which resulted in a clear obsession with sex and sexual relationships, and with the role and behaviour of women.⁸⁸ Catholic Ireland was not unique when it came to sexual prudery, for Protestant Britain and America shared similar attitudes. Diarmaid Ferriter makes the point:

Ireland's sexual history must be placed in the context of European nationalism and the quest for 'respectable' sexuality; part of an international struggle to cope with the perceived evils of modernity, increased industrialisation, political upheaval and the construction of middle-class norms of the body and sexual behaviour.⁸⁹

Ireland's distinctiveness lay in the intensity that these attitudes penetrated Irish society, and how long the obsession persisted.⁹⁰

Seán O'Faolain gives a typically robust account of the comprehensive range of the subjects of this obsession:

Since my boyhood I have heard my elders fulminating about keeping company, night courting, dancing at the crossroads, V necks, silk stockings, late dances, drinking at dances, mixed bathing, advertisements for

⁸⁸ K.H. Connell, 'Catholicism and marriage in the century after the famine', in Connell, K.H. *Irish Peasant Society*, 113-161.

⁸⁹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2012), 2.

⁹⁰ Tom Inglis, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland', *Éire-Ireland*, Vol. 40, Nos. 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2005), 23.

feminine underwear, jitterbugging, girls who take part in immodest sports (such as jumping or hurdling), English and American books and magazines, short frocks, Bikinis, cycling shorts, and even waltzing, which I have heard elegantly described as “belly-to-belly dancing”.⁹¹

Pastoral letters from the bishops provide confirmation of O’Faolain’s recollections, and evidence of the subjects of Catholic concerns. Whyte sums up:

The bishops found cause for dismay in many different areas. Their pastorals abound in denunciations of intemperance, gambling, perjury, crimes of violence and many other evils. But there was one sphere in particular which aroused their alarm. By far the most prominent topic in their public statements was the decline in sexual morality.⁹²

The bishops feared ‘modernity’. They feared communism. They feared that new forms of mass media – radio, cinema, paperback ‘pulp’ fiction, the increasingly-read English sensationalist newspapers – were introducing new values and new fashions. The new fashion for dancing, with hundreds of small dance-halls drew particular criticism. In fact Gibbons points out:

In retrospect, it is difficult to grasp the intensity of the opposition to dance-halls mounted by moral crusaders as diverse as the *Irish Times* and the Catholic hierarchy and more work needs to be done to sketch in the volatile cultural climate of the period to account for such moral panics. The dance-hall was singled out on several occasions by the hierarchy as the most dangerous source of corruption in the community.⁹³

Dancing, along with cinema-going which often featured dancing, were the pre-eminent leisure activities in Europe and the United States in the inter-World War

⁹¹ Seán O’Faoláin, ‘Love among the Irish’, in John A. O’Brien (ed.), *The Vanishing Irish* (London: W.H.Allen, 1955), 115.

⁹² John Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1980), 24.

⁹³ Gibbons, *Transformations*, 100.

years. Dancing was, of course, an important opportunity to meet the opposite sex which is why it attracted so much fear and negative attention from the moralists, and so much popularity and excitement from the participants. In Ireland, as elsewhere, dance hall entrepreneurs were responsive to this new market. Criticism of dance-halls centred on their numbers, locations, the availability of drink, their lack of supervision and chaperoning, hours of opening and association with motor cars. In 1941 there were approximately 1,200 halls licensed for dancing in the 26 counties.⁹⁴

John McGahern, somewhat countering his own “dark time indeed” thesis,⁹⁵ recounts:

A ruined ballroom near where I live stands as a monument, its curved iron roof rusted, its walls unpainted. A local man Patsy Conboy, built it with money he made in the U.S., and he hired famous dance bands all through the 1950s. It was the forerunner of the Cloudlands and the Roselands and all the other lands, and he called it Fenaghville. In spite of being denounced from several pulpits, Fenaghville prospered and Patsy Conboy became a local hero. People came by bus, by lorry, by hackney car, horse trap, on bicycle and on foot to dance the night away. Couples met amongst the spangled lights on the dusty dance floor and invited one another out to view the moon and take the beneficial air. ‘There wasn’t a haycock safe for a mile around in the month of July.’⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Flann O’Brien, ‘The Dance Halls’, *The Bell*, Vol.1 No.5 (Feb.1941) , 44.

⁹⁵ John McGahern, quoted in Tóibín, *Bad Blood*, 79.

⁹⁶ John McGahern, ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’, in John McGahern, *Love of the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 131.

Traditional dance sites had long been the private house or cottage, barns and sheds, and the cross-roads. These uncontrolled sites for informal dancing were a source of great concern to the clergy. Bryan MacMahon recalls the reactions of some priests:

Wooden roadside platforms were set on fire by curates: surer still, the priests drove their motorcars backward and forward over the timber platforms: concertinas were sent flying into hill streams, and those who played music at dances were branded as outcasts.⁹⁷

In order to ensure control, the clergy began to build their own parish halls. As these proliferated, the hierarchy lobbied the government to prevent informal Irish dances being held elsewhere. They were also determined to oppose the commercial dance-halls where modern dancing was proving so popular. The government response was the Public Dance Hall Act (1935) which both curtailed informal Irish dancing sites, and regulated, or closed, commercial modern dancing venues. Similar concerns about dancing were expressed elsewhere. Barbara O'Connor reflects, "Dance has long been associated with sex and sin, not just in Ireland but also throughout England, Europe and North America. At the most mundane level, one need look no further for evidence than to the various humorous versions of the Puritan maxim that sex was to be avoided as it might lead to dancing."⁹⁸ Reporting about New Zealand, Griffiths points out "During the 1920s and 1930s concern was increasingly voiced about modern influences such as jazz dancing, women's changing behaviour

⁹⁷ Bryan MacMahon, 'Getting on the High Road Again', in John A. O'Brien (ed.), *The Vanishing Irish*, 212.

⁹⁸ Barbara O'Connor, 'Ruin and Romance: Heterosexual Discourses on Irish Popular Dance, 1920-1960', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol.12, No2 (2003), 52.

in relation to dances, drinking at dances and the effects of such modernity on the family.”⁹⁹ Clerical pronouncements and regular press comments confirm that the elites did express a repressive attitude. However, the fact that the condemnations continued unabated across the decades, also suggests that the repression failed. Dance-halls proliferated in the 1920s and 1930s because there was a profitable market; ‘jazz’ dancing was attacked because it was evidently popular, people travelled distances to meet the opposite sex because it proved worthwhile. The clergy, and the authorities were repressive, but the laity show little evidence of being repressed.

While the public debate concentrated on morality, the core conflict was between tradition and modernity. Whyte claims, “If a full survey was undertaken, it might appear that the Irish Catholic preoccupation with sexual morality in twenties, thirties and forties of this century was only an extreme example of a trend to be found among the more traditionally-minded people all over the world.”¹⁰⁰ The First World War was proving pivotal in cultural change, certainly in the western world. The United States rather than London and Paris was now the decisive fashion creator. Hollywood with its star system and sophisticated publicity operations set the trends of fashion, and provided images of hitherto unimaginable life-styles. The cinema destroyed ignorance of modernity. There were those who could afford to

⁹⁹ John Griffiths, ‘Popular Culture and Modernity: Dancing in New Zealand Society 1920-1945’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol.41, No. 3 (Spring, 2008), 618.

¹⁰⁰ Whyte, *Church and State*, 22.

embrace the modernity they saw on the cinema-screen, and did so joyously. Following independence there was an increase in the employment of young single women. In the reorganised civil service, for example, there was an increase of 140% in female civil servants between 1922 and 1932.¹⁰¹ Increasing numbers of educated young women gaining economic independence through incomes from office-working and professional careers – one-fifth of all medical graduates in Ireland in 1926 were women¹⁰² – chose a lifestyle more in tune with the wider Western world, than with traditional conservative Ireland.

In a study of the articles and advertisements in the magazine the *Modern Girl*, Louise Ryan has constructed the life-styles and the attitudes to life of a small, vibrant group of young women that vividly contrasts with the received image of a uniformly dull and repressive Irish society in the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s. Ryan summarises:

They worked in offices, enjoyed dancing and keenly followed international fashion trends. By their very existence these young women challenge the usual representation of Irish women as repressed, pious, rural, homely, modest, traditional, unglamorous and insular. The lifestyles of fashionable flappers raise questions about the homogeneity and cultural hegemony of de Valera's Ireland. The *Modern Girl* suggests a wide gulf between urban and rural, and, within urban centres, vast differences between working-class and middle-class life experiences.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Mary Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State, 1922-1939', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.6, No 4/ Vol. 7 No. 1 (Winter/ Spring 1995), 105.

¹⁰² Louise Ryan, 'Negotiating Modernity and Tradition: Newspaper Debates on the "Modern Girl" in the Irish Free State', *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 7, No.2 (July 1998), 13.

¹⁰³ Louise Ryan, 'Constructing "Irishwoman": Modern Girls and Comely Maidens', *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1998), 272.

Ryan uses the further evidence from newspapers and magazines to expand on the lifestyle of a modern, single, white collar and professional woman in the 1920s and 1930s who, “embodies many of the qualities of the fashionable flapper and occupied a world of bachelor flats and bed-sits, wore lovely clothes and enjoyed a carefree lifestyle.”¹⁰⁴ These Irish women did not allow themselves to be confined; they were giving leads. By 1930 the Irish Free State had one of the highest percentage of female attendance at secondary schools in Europe, and only Finland had a higher attendance at university.¹⁰⁵ Clair Wills reflects the alternative reality of many people’s lives:

It would be foolish to suggest that conservative Catholic-nationalism succeeded in holding back the modern tide of conjugal love and individualism in Ireland – obviously the frequency with which the Church hierarchy complained about dancing, company keeping, immodest fashions, as well as romance and sensational novels suggest that a real contest was going on – a contest which the Church clearly lost.¹⁰⁶

This continual criticism of any modern fashion or lifestyle was not only a Catholic obsession, but was echoed in Protestant newspapers and by Protestant clergy as well. In Northern Ireland, Winifred Campbell recalled her Belfast youth when “we

¹⁰⁴ Louise Ryan, *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press, 1922-1937: Embodying the Nation* (Lampeter: Edward Mellen Press, 2002), 9.

¹⁰⁵ Daly, ‘Women in the Irish Free State’, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Wills, ‘Women, Domesticity and the Family’, 53.

were preached to in the factory, at open-air meetings, lunchtime meetings”, all because of the fashion for bobbed hair, shorter skirts and low necklines.¹⁰⁷

The Catholic Church’s preoccupation with sexual matters was motivated by its concept of the family as the basic unit of society. Everything seemed to be judged on how it would affect the family, which must be protected and preserved.¹⁰⁸ Simultaneously, sexual sins were censured in the cause of extra-marital celibacy, while sexual activity within marriage was idealised in the cause of fertility. The cruel paradox was that the Church should extol the family unit that would result from marriage, while determinedly preventing so many from having the opportunity to enjoy a family of their own. Ireland in 1960 had the lowest marriage rate – 5.5 per 1000 – of any country in the world for which statistics were known.¹⁰⁹ The 1936 population census showed that 74% of males aged between 25-34 were unmarried as were 55% of females of the same ages.¹¹⁰ The constant denigration of sexual activity, as well as the economic realities, ensured that marriage was unpopular, especially in rural Ireland. It could also be that the high rate of marriage fertility was itself a deterrent for some individuals.¹¹¹ There were other factors. For example, late ages of

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Rosemary Cullen-Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-70* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 2005), 258.

¹⁰⁸ Humphries, *New Dubliners*, 55.

¹⁰⁹ *Eurostat (1981)* Quoted in Rudd, ‘Invisible Exports’, 308.

¹¹⁰ Rudd, ‘Invisible Exports’, 308.

¹¹¹ Walsh, ‘Marriage in Ireland’, 138.

marriage meant that the Free State had an abnormally high number of widows and fatherless children. The older children often had to work to support mother and siblings before being able to consider starting a family of their own. Saving to afford marriage was usually impossible.¹¹²

Charlie Doogan supporting his mother Mary and his siblings is one effective fictional example in Peadar O'Donnell's *Islanders* (1927).¹¹³ Despite the intensity of their poverty and the constant risks in working to survive, the novel, through Charlie, is positive, full of life and colour and action. An uncomplaining community supporting each other both to survive and to develop is the theme vividly narrated through the micro-dramas of island existence. Yet the harsh reality of life is accepted without drama. "After the burial of Mary Doogan, Charlie and Sally settled down to the task of rearing their younger brothers and sisters". The future was as if ordained:

Charlie would go to Scotland. He would earn his passage to America, besides helping them at home. Once in America he would send the passage money to the others as they grew up.

And Sally, poor Sally, she would remain to mother the brood, and by the time that was done her youth would be gone. She faced her task without thinking. Such was her stock and their code.¹¹⁴

Sally's code and her circumstances dictated her unmarried future. John A. O'Brien suggests that for others an important factor that explains 'the grotesque

¹¹² James Meenan, 'Some Causes and Consequences of the Low Irish Marriage Rate', *Proceedings of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, (1933), 24.

¹¹³ Peadar O'Donnell, *Islanders* (1927) (Cork: Mercier, 1988).

¹¹⁴ O'Donnell, *Islanders*, 109.

proportion of bachelors and spinsters amongst the Irish' was the 'touch of Jansenism' in the typical Irish attitude to marriage:

That attitude looks upon marriage and sex as rather regrettable necessities in the propagation of the race: it would have been much better if God had arranged for offspring in some other way. Irish parents shy away from the distasteful task of lifting the veil upon this earthy, unappetizing, and somewhat unclean subject.¹¹⁵

The tradition of rural marriage that survived into the early decades of independence was based on economic requirements of physical labour and land inheritance. Assumed family needs were paramount, and individuals did not expect choice based on personal feelings. Indeed, Wills summarises, "But as important as the strict regulation of sexuality, was the cultural disapproval of love and romance – in effect disapproval of companionate marriage (a crucial ingredient of family life and personal identity for the modern individual)."¹¹⁶

Hugh Brody describes how, in his Inishkillane on the West coast, marriage was "a very real partnership" but one that,"consisted of co-operation without great physical closeness", which he ascribes to the physical separation necessitated by male and female work.¹¹⁷ Schepper-Hughes in a much-contested study in West Kerry

¹¹⁵ O'Brien, John, A, 'Disappearing Irish in America', in John. A. O'Brien (ed.), *The Vanishing Irish*, (London: W.H.Allen, 1955), 99.

¹¹⁶ Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family', 46.

¹¹⁷ Hugh Brody, *Innishkillane. Change and Decline in the West of Ireland* (London: Jill Norman and Hobhouse, 1973), 112.

interprets husband and wife relationships in the old tradition as being a sign of “the dysfunctional sexual lives of many of the inhabitants”:

The sexes were, I contended, alienated from each other, and this alienation continued in marriage among couples who spent little time alone in each other’s company, who eschewed the use of personal names and other expressions of verbal or physical intimacy, and who could state philosophically at the funeral of a spouse, ‘Well, sure, and weren’t we ever strangers to each other in any case?’¹¹⁸

While Scheper-Hughes considered her original study had been too prescriptive, and the term ‘sexual alienation’ was perhaps too strong, the general thesis held true.

It is salutary to remember that Irish women were not necessarily either powerless or victims of imposed social systems. Mary Hayden, writing in 1941, points out that marrying was not solely a matter of statistics, economics or supply and demand, but a matter of personal choice, especially for ‘modern girls’ like herself:

True it is that the modern girl, knowing that she is or will be in all probability able to support herself if necessary by her own exertions, is rather less easy to please in regard to a husband than was the maiden of some generations ago, to whom marriage was often the only alternative to semi-starvation, a resort to public charity, or a degrading dependence on unwilling relations. But this is surely no disadvantage; since Christian marriage is, or should be, a matter of free choice, not a last resource to avoid worse things.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, ‘From anxiety to analysis: rethinking Irish sexuality and sex roles’, *Women’s Studies*, Vol.10, (1983), 149.

¹¹⁹ Mary Hayden, ‘Women’s Role in the Modern World’, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 69, No. 818 (Aug.1941), 400.

Despite the late ages of marrying couples, marriage fertility was high. One aspect of the idealised Irish family was its size. Daly argues, "Indeed, it is evident that large families were regarded as a key feature of Irish society, something to be upheld and admired, and that any decline in family size was a cause for concern."¹²⁰ High rates of emigration allowed high rates of fertility. A growing population would have created strains on land occupation and rents, and on employment and urban housing, and could have acted as a natural check on fertility.

With an ideology fixated on the family and the sanctity of marriage, unmarried mothers were a threat. Luddy suggests:

Their fate was generally to be shamed and disgraced. From the foundation of the state, unmarried mothers, while they generally enjoyed the benefits of citizenship as women, had, ironically, in a state that applauded motherhood, no rights as mothers. Their children also had no rights and retained the stigma of illegitimacy.¹²¹

There were, however, many in the community who supported unmarried mothers with a conspiracy of silence. They understood and empathised with the frightened young women for whom an unwanted pregnancy was not an abstract problem of morality, but a practical problem of survival. Concealment of any deviance from the strict norms of this conservative society became necessary to maintain the myth of Irish purity. As Joseph Lee argues, by the early twentieth century Irish

¹²⁰ Mary E. Daly, 'Marriage, Fertility and Women's Lives in Twentieth-Century Ireland (c1900-c1970)', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (September 2006), 574.

¹²¹ Luddy, 'Moral Rescue and Unmarried Mothers in Ireland in the 1920s', *Women's Studies* Vol. 30 (2001), 813.

propagandists, “had all but completed their communal self-portrait of a simple, natural, warm, homogenous society, a veritable miracle of human and Christian harmony.”¹²² Seán O’Faoláin laughs at the secrecy and the delusions when Michael Hannafey in *Come Back to Erin* (1940) angrily replies to a beggar who has said he lives next door to a “bad house” in Cork city:

“Rubbish!” cried the other. “There’s no such thing in Ireland. You mean a brothel?” Because of the other drinkers they had to lean together so as not to be overheard. “Oh, no! There might be one in Dublin! But not in Cork.”¹²³

Clair Wills neatly sums up Catholic nationalist constructions of femininity: “sexually innocent and safely domestic”.¹²⁴ The State’s determination to promote at all costs the image of a sexually virtuous society quite superior to other states, was both hypocritical and inhibited it from taking the legislative action to remedy manifest problems.

Following the establishment of the Committee of Inquiry regarding Venereal Disease in 1926, prostitution was more actively prosecuted by the Garda. Prior to this, the brothels that had flourished in Dublin’s red light district, the Monto, had operated openly without much official interference.¹²⁵ In both urban and rural

¹²² Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 375.

¹²³ Seán O’Faoláin. *Come Back to Erin* (1940) (New York: The Viking Press, 1940), 19-20.

¹²⁴ Clair Wills, ‘Women Writers and the Death of Rural Ireland: Realism and Nostalgia in the 1940s’, *Éire-Ireland*, Vol. 41, Nos. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2006), 193.

¹²⁵ Una Crowley and Rob. Kitchin, “Producing ‘decent girls’: governmentality and the moral geographies of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922-1937)”, *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol.15, No.4 (August, 2008), 364.

Ireland, the official policy of Churches and government to eradicate prostitution was thwarted by the tolerance of the people. Prostitutes were 'open secrets', as long they operated discreetly and within a set of unwritten, unspoken rules.¹²⁶ Maura Laverty's *Never No More* (1942) depicts one such, Sarah Gorry.¹²⁷ The novel is conventional in its morality, and yet Sarah Gorry is one of the most sympathetic characters, who was "slow-moving and languorous" with a "wonderful capacity for hard work, and could foot turf and snag turnips better than any man." (NNM, 39) Sarah was not just a physical being, for "she had an insatiable appetite for books, particularly romantic novels." (NNM, 40) She may well have four children all with different fathers but she was welcomed to work washing clothes in Gran's very proper home, because she was not a threat to Ballyderrig. Her clientele were not the resident village men, but the "furtive kerchiefed men from the canal boats" (NNM, 39) who were passing through. "She made no secret of her profession, and we accepted her for what she was, and that was all that there was to it." (NNM, 39) As a result, "There wasn't a woman in Ballyderrig, however respectably married, who wouldn't stop and chat to Sarah when she met her on the road or street." (NNM, 39) In her warm-hearted human saga, Laverty reminds that the gap between the espoused theory of Ireland's elites and the real practice of Ireland's people could be filled by the kindly as readily as by the puritans and the zealots. *Never No More* was

¹²⁶ Morgan Paige Denton, 'Open Secrets: Prostitution and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Irish Society' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York, 2012), 2.

¹²⁷ Maura Laverty, *Never No More* (1942) (London: Virago, 1985). Subsequent references given in the text as (NNM, page number).

banned by the censors not just for its frank and enlightened depictions of Irish sexuality and the workings of the female body, but because she breached the 'open secret'.

In enforcing a new Puritanism, the strong farmers were joined by their natural allies in the various clergies. Priests were recruited mainly from the strong farmer class, and, though many urban clergy were the sons of shop and public house owners, the majority – even those ministering in the towns and cities – were from rural backgrounds.¹²⁸ The deference priests received – and expected – from their parishioners because of their religious status gave them remarkable secular power also. Priests expected to be benign matchmakers or determined arbitrators, and expected to be obeyed. They had influence over public servants including dispensary doctors, and librarians, and had particular power over teachers whose very living – appointment, promotion, dismissal – was in their gift.¹²⁹ John McGahern says of his days at teacher training college, “We were being trained as non-commissioned officers to the priests in running the different parishes throughout Ireland, secondary to the priests in all things, including education.” He claims that, “they wanted us to be obedient and conformist – cogs in a wheel of power.”¹³⁰ Local shopkeepers and publicans relied on at least maintaining the

¹²⁸ Joseph Lee, 'Women and the Church', 41.

¹²⁹ K.H. Connell, *Irish Peasant Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 143-156.

¹³⁰ John McGahern, quoted in Linda Collinge and Emmanuel Vernadakis, 'John McGahern. Interviews of Short Story Writers', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, Vol. 41, (Autumn 2003), 126.

priest's goodwill, and preferably obtaining his patronage, for any embargo hinted at by him meant ruin. The priest could, therefore, rely on the local middle-class and professional classes to support his actions.

The priests acted as agents of social control by their teaching and prominence in the community, hearing and controlling all. If this social manipulation failed, "there was one final way to deal with dissidents: the way of threats, intimidation and punishment."¹³¹ Inglis argues that the power of the threat of excommunication "may have been as much feared as execution itself."¹³² Sensitivity to even hints of criticism or dissension elicited a fierce and often disproportionate reaction from the clergy that usually achieved its purpose in discouraging any repeat. The most common sanction was to be 'read' – denounced – 'from the altar'. Maura Laverty, in a passage that is the more effective for being in shocking contrast to the positive tone of the rest of *Never No More*, reflects her deep anger at the cruelties such priests caused. Father Dempsey had refused to allow two local Republicans to lie in the chapel, saying, "I would not have my church polluted by them." When Father Dempsey himself dies, his body lies overnight in the chapel. In the morning the church is opened:

The chapel was filled with a dreadful odour, for something terrible had happened during the night. The coffin that had enclosed poor Father

¹³¹Pat Buckley, *Faith and Fatherland: The Irish News, The Catholic Hierarchy and the Management of Dissidents* (Belfast: Belfast Historical and Educational Society, 1991), 17.

¹³²Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 143.

Dempsey's swollen dropsical body had burst and the floor around it was covered with awfulness.¹³³

Laverty, through her Gran character, had shown compassion and forgiveness to all, including the wayward. The ungenerous priest alone gets his desserts.

There is evidence that while the Church, through its bishops, priests and lay-activists gave a strong lead, the people were ready to choose not to follow. There was an established tradition in which many Irish Catholics proved capable of discriminating between subjects of Church competence – morality and doctrinal issues – and areas of secular competence, especially politics.¹³⁴ The twentieth century provides many examples of what McCullagh noted of the nineteenth century: “Irish Catholics were not prisoners of their Church. They were prepared to ignore those aspects of its teaching, such as the encouragement of early marriage, which did not suit them.”¹³⁵ As McCaffrey points out, “Most Irish citizens are committed to the liberal democratic traditions of Irish nationalism. They do not tolerate Catholic frustrations of national objectives or clerical interference in areas clearly political.”¹³⁶

In areas of their own lives, people made decisions that made sense to them.

Richard Kearney points out that when considering a “conservative religious outlook

¹³³ Laverty, *Never No More*, 248, 249.

¹³⁴ Thomas Bartlett, ‘Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923-1970: An appraisal re-appraised’, in Bernard Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002), 250.

¹³⁵ C. McCullagh, ‘A tie that binds: Family and Ideology in Ireland’, *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 22, (1991), 209.

¹³⁶ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, ‘Irish Nationalism and Irish Catholicism: A Study in Cultural Identity’, *Church History*, Vol.42, No.4 (Dec.1973), 532.

in our laws", "many might wish to distinguish between the conservative *ought* of our legislation and the more liberal *is* of our everyday lives."¹³⁷ For example, lectures about sending children to Catholic schools, and for students not to attend Trinity College, suggest that people were actually choosing the school or university that suited them, regardless of its denomination. Valiulis argues that the ideal of women constructed by both Catholic and Protestant discourse was transcended:

The reality was that increasing numbers of women worked outside the home. A significant number of women never married, Women continued to emigrate in increasing numbers. Women were exploring their sexuality, were having children outside of marriage. Women were going to dances, wearing imported fashions and going to films – often enough for the complaint to be heard that they were never at home. Women were agitating for political rights, demanding a public identity. In essence, women were modern actors in a modernising society.¹³⁸

Forty years of independence did not lessen the strong confessional identity. In 1961, the Protestant population – 4% of the total – still accounted for one third of directors and managers, and only 652 of 48,000 labourers.¹³⁹ In 1955, 80% of Protestants worked mainly with other Protestants, and 90% for a Protestant-owned firm.¹⁴⁰ Niall Meehan's study of advertising in the job sections of the *Irish Times* and

¹³⁷ Richard Kearney, 'Faith and Fatherland', *The Crane Bag*, Vol.8, No.1 (1984), 55.

¹³⁸ Maryann Valiulis, 'Neither Feminist nor Flapper: the Ecclesiastical Construction of the ideal Irish woman', in Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichart (eds.), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen. Women's Status in Church, State and Society* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1995), 176.

¹³⁹ Jack White, *Minority Report: the Protestant community in the Irish Republic* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 71.

¹⁴⁰ Kurt Bowen, *Protestants in a Catholic State: Ireland's privileged majority* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), 96-97.

the *Irish Independent* reveals how widespread, and how unremarkable, was sectarian recruitment. He concludes:

It appears on the basis of advertising, that southern Irish Protestants entered the world in a Protestant maternity hospital, attended by Protestant midwives, nurses and doctors and fed by Protestant cooks, went to a Protestant school, were fed by more Protestants and had wounds tended by a Protestant matron. Games played by Catholics were avoided, apart from soccer, where a Church of Ireland league maintained exclusivity. There were Protestant scouts and guides plus the Boys' Brigade.¹⁴¹

It would appear that both communities were equally determined to maintain their own exclusivity.

Ecumenism was notably absent in Irish society. Archbishop McQuaid, who was appointed Archbishop of Dublin in 1940, with de Valera's support, remains the symbol of entrenched ideology. Indeed, the Jesuit editor of *Studies* in his editorial introducing a special edition dedicated to a consideration of McQuaid's career, claims:

His understanding of ecumenism was no different to that of Pius XI, Pope in the 1930s, whose attitude to other Christian communities has been described as, 'Come in slowly with your hands above your heads.' In short, he was a product of a world with which his values, attitudes and vision were in harmony. Only at the end of his life was he out of kilter with a changing Church in a changing society. Had he died in 1961 we would speak more of his attainments and would be less aware of his weaknesses.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Niall Meehan, 'Shorthand for Protestants', 48. See also a Protestant life-cycle in Cork in, Ian d'Alton, "'A Vestigial Population'?: Perspectives on Southern Irish Protestants in the Twentieth Century', *Éire-Ireland*, Vol.44, No.3&4 (Fall-Winter 2009), 33n-34n.

¹⁴² 'Editorial', *Studies*, Vol.87, No. 348 (Winter1998), 335.

Peter Somerville-Large has provided some balance by listing some of Archbishop McQuaid's attainments:

During the Emergency he organised the Catholic Social Services Conference, which set up twenty-seven food centres, arranged for ambulances to transport the poor to hospitals and founded a maternity welfare unit. He was responsible for remand centres for juvenile delinquents, founded homes for unmarried mothers, and arranged screening for venereal diseases. He was quietly generous, receiving thousands of begging letters and giving money out of private funds bequeathed by pious parishioners.¹⁴³

Unfortunately for McQuaid's reputation even these well-intentioned deeds are now clouded by knowledge of how some of these homes and institutions were operated.

The worldwide spirit of reform that flourished in the 1960s was exemplified by the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council (1962-65). This resulted in sweeping reforms, most obviously the replacement of Latin by the vernacular, and greater involvement of the laity both in services and in parish management. Archbishop McQuaid claimed that there would be no real change: "You may have been worried about much talk of changes to come. Allow me to reassure you. No change will worry the tranquillity of your Christian Lives."¹⁴⁴ He was wrong. John McGahern observed of the Irish 1950s: "the Church controlled nearly all of education, the hospitals, the orphanages, the juvenile prison system, the parish halls. It is difficult to think of an area of life that their power and influence did not enter,

¹⁴³ Peter Somerville-Large, *Irish Voices: An Informal History 1916-1966* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 231.

¹⁴⁴ Archbishop McQuaid, quoted in Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950. The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2002), 112.

unless it was amongst writers and intellectuals, and they did not count.”¹⁴⁵ Within a decade the days of the autocratic priest were numbered and respect had to be earned by behaviour not position. Recruitment into the priesthood and into religious orders began a dramatic decline.¹⁴⁶

Perhaps the most significant innovation in terms of changing public knowledge and attitudes was the availability of television, beginning with British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) transmissions from Belfast in 1953, and then, in 1962, the creation of Telefís Éireann. As Ronan Fanning makes clear: “it is as difficult to calculate the impact as it is to exaggerate the importance of this development.” He continues: “Put crudely, the Irish people now had a window on the world never before open to them; and that window opened on a strange and exciting vista which neither state nor church authorities could any longer hide from their gaze.”¹⁴⁷ By the mid-sixties over half the homes in the country had a television set. The people watched some British and many American productions, whose cultural values were very different to those espoused by State and Church elites in Ireland. Deference towards political and Church leaders changed to challenge, with explanations of actions required instead of dictats. As confidence by the broadcasters

¹⁴⁵ John McGahern, quoted in Pat Rabbitte, ‘Politics, Morality and Religion’, *Irish Review*, No. 27 (Summer 2001), 55.

¹⁴⁶ Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Helicon, 1983), 201.

¹⁴⁷ Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, 201.

increased they provided opportunities for rigorous interviewing of politicians, and public discussion of subjects formerly taboo, especially sexual behaviours.¹⁴⁸

Legislative reforms responded to the new attitudes. A Films Appeal Board established in 1964 relaxed film censorship. The Censorship of Publications Act (1967) limited prohibition to twelve years. Most significant was the reform in secondary education. State-supported comprehensive schools were introduced in 1963. As a result, the 118,807 pupils in secondary education in 1967-68 had risen to 167,309 in 1973-74.¹⁴⁹ With each year that passed, novelists in the post-1960 decades were to have a much larger market of educated readers than that available in the earlier post-independence years. These novelists also enjoyed one great advantage denied to their pre-1960s colleagues, “the development of a vibrant, indigenous publishing industry.”¹⁵⁰

Desmond Fennell argues that in the preceding decades, while there were some literary and journalistic voices who dissented from the idealization of rural Ireland, it was only from the mid-1960s onwards that dissent changed to denigration:

The vehicle for this turnabout was the ideology called, variously, “Dublin-liberal,” “Dublin 4,” or “revisionist.” Broadcast powerfully by the Dublin

¹⁴⁸ Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, 200-201.

¹⁴⁹ Terence Brown, *Ireland*, 240.

¹⁵⁰ Dermot Bolger (ed.), ‘Introduction’, *The Picador Book of Irish Contemporary Fiction* (London: Pan Books, 1993), x.

media, this political ideology projected images of “rural Ireland” as darkness, repression and backwardness.¹⁵¹

The gap between image and reality is a constant difficulty in studying Irish society. Newspapers typify this unspoken conflict. In their editorials and articles they support and reinforce the ideology of the secular elites and those of the Churches. In their reportage of day-to-day events, the newspapers, “perhaps inadvertently, revealed multifaceted realities of Irish life which were more diverse and complicated than the simple ideals advocated by those in power.”¹⁵² Ursula Barry argues that:

the conclusion is often drawn that social and private lives in this society are lived predominantly on Catholic moral lines. While there is truth in this, it misses the divergence that exists in reality (and which at times becomes a gulf) between social practices (how people live their lives) and social laws. And this dislocation is key to understanding the Irish social system.¹⁵³

Such an understanding requires looking beyond Ireland as dark, repressed and backward, and considering the evidence of other realities. Louise Ryan, in surveying lifestyle magazines, concludes: “Far from being backward and insular, Ireland is presented as an outward looking country which can embrace modernising influences while retaining its own unique identity.”¹⁵⁴

In the light of such evidence, Joe Cleary asks why there remains a fixation with these decades which he sees as characterised by commentators “as a grimly

¹⁵¹ Fennell, ‘The Recent Birth and Checkered Career of “Rural Ireland”’, 13-14.

¹⁵² Ryan, *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press, 1922-1937*, 257.

¹⁵³ Ursula Barry, ‘Movement, Change and Reaction. The Struggle over Reproductive Rights in Ireland’, in Ailbhe Smyth(ed.), *The Abortion Papers Ireland* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1992), 110.

¹⁵⁴ Ryan, ‘Constructing “Irishwoman”’, 271.

oppressive 'dark age'".¹⁵⁵ He questions the motives of later generations for maintaining this fixation:

As the world of 'de Valera's Ireland' or the decades of autarkic development recede into the past, either a more apologetic or a more complex understanding may well emerge to contest the condescension towards that period that conventional naturalistic representations invite. What needs to be stressed, however, is that it is not the past that needs to be rescued or redeemed, but the future. The fact that contemporary Irish society continues to rely so heavily on invocations of the darkness of the past to validate its sense of its own enlightenment is not very reassuring.¹⁵⁶

Brian Fallon agrees: "The Irish passion for self-criticism and even self-denigration has given hostages to people today who are eager to indict an entire age in order to fulfil certain intellectual agenda of their own."¹⁵⁷ Frank O'Connor may be correct in asserting that "without the concept of a normal society – the novel is impossible."¹⁵⁸ However, the argument that Ireland did not have a 'normal' society is not supported by the evidence. The notion, nevertheless, has gained credence through constant repetition until it has become an accepted truth, for, as Averill has pointed out, "Most Irish writers regarded their society as peculiar, self-defeating, and out of step with other western societies, and they could not

¹⁵⁵ Joe Cleary, 'Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology in Contemporary Irish Culture', in Ray Ryan (ed.), *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 108.

¹⁵⁶ Cleary, 'Modernization', 126.

¹⁵⁷ Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 17.

achieve the stable, universalised view of Irish life that the novel demands.”¹⁵⁹

Their writings promoted their beliefs and reinforced the negative image.

The first argument – that Ireland did not have a structured, stratified society to support the novel, especially the novel of manners – is contradicted by the facts. There is abundant evidence of a long-established middle-class, itself multi-divided. Similarly the working classes in both town and country shared this acute awareness of status difference based on wealth or poverty, land and occupation. The further argument that Ireland’s society is ‘abnormal’, being “broken and insecure”¹⁶⁰, “disrupted, transitional”¹⁶¹, and “bigoted, intolerant, cowardly, philistine and spiritually crippled”¹⁶², fails when the rhetoric of the elites is contrasted with the behaviour of the people. The repressive theories of society espoused by the Catholic Church were subverted by the theories-in-action of the citizenry. For many of these citizens, physical life was very hard, with poverty, poor housing, inadequate welfare services and few amenities. The nation’s straitened economy, exacerbated by the worldwide depression of the 1930s and the post-war recession of the 1950s, afflicted the whole period. Like all nations, Ireland had its differences and peculiarities, but these were of degree and not of kind. Irish society was different, but it was not

¹⁵⁹ Deborah M. Averill, *The Irish Short Story from George Moore to Frank O’Connor* (Lanham: University Press of America,, 1982), 24.

¹⁶⁰ Tóibín, “Martyrs and Metaphors’, 45.

¹⁶¹ Averill, *The Irish Short Story*, 24.

¹⁶² McGahern, quoted in Tóibín, *Bad Blood*, 79.

unique nor even particularly exceptional and it was not 'abnormal'. If the Irish novel did fail, Irish society was not the cause.

Chapter Three: Reading Ireland

Pro capita litoris habent sua fata libelli.

The fate of books depends on the capacity of the reader.

Terentius Maurus (floruit c.AD 200)

The literate nature of Irish society, and its attitude to fiction, impacted directly on Irish novelists *as* novelists. As writers, their created message needed an audience of readers with the requisite skills and sensitivities for comprehension and interpretation, and with an interest in actually reading novels. As professional writers they also needed an efficient print industry to communicate the message to that audience through a market willing and able to resource the costs of production. Once produced, the books needed an efficient distribution system so that they were readily accessible to their reading audience through bookshops, other book retail outlets, schools, and libraries of various kinds. As Q.D. Leavis argues:

Changes in environment, then (using 'environment' broadly to mean all external circumstances which determine the pattern of the average life), are seen to be primarily responsible for the kind of fiction the general public requires and gets. But the environment is ultimately responsible for a great deal more: it determines the extent to which the man in the street has access to literature, the market that the serious novelist can count on; that is to say, in the last event, the quality of living and the solvency of literature.¹

¹ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), 207.

There is abundant evidence that Ireland's literary environment created men and women 'in the street' who did in fact comprise a skilled and numerous audience that chose to access fiction.

Literacy does not appear to have been a problem. Joseph Lee, referencing a study of the new states created after the First World War, indicates, "Irish literacy levels, verging on 100 per cent, compared favourably with literacy rates of 70 per cent in Bulgaria and Poland, 60 per cent in Romania, 50 per cent in Yugoslavia, and 20 per cent in Albania."² He further argues that Ireland's proportion of university students in 1922 was only slightly less than in Britain, France and Belgium.³ However, literacy statistics are unreliable, and international comparative statistics even more so. Literacy, in Ireland as elsewhere, had no objective testing, was often self-assessed on census returns, or by the percentage of people who signed marriage registers, and had no accepted baseline of achievement. Different texts demanded different levels of literacy skill. Newspapers, for example, were written with their specific target audience in mind. Popular newspapers, magazines, tracts, posters and pamphlets used language carefully to ensure that their message was successfully communicated. Thus people who were functionally literate when dealing with commonplace texts with their limited vocabulary may not necessarily have had the skills to access other texts, such as poetry or extended fiction which deliberately use

² J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1922-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 76.

³ Lee, *Ireland*, 76.

a range of vocabulary and a more complex structure to explore their ideas. Literacy is text specific.

The middle- and upper-class within Ireland had a long tradition of literacy and of reading literature. For the labouring classes, the nineteenth century had seen the slow evolution from a mainly oral to a mainly literate society.⁴ By mid-century, and encouraged by Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal Association and the literary energy of the Young Ireland movement with its campaigning newspaper, *Nation*, people were increasingly frequenting reading rooms, buying or renting newspapers, reading newspapers in public houses, and listening to newspapers being read aloud in reading rooms or at chapel gates.⁵ Literacy was valued. The establishment of a national primary school system in 1831 provided the mechanism for a more systematic teaching of literacy – and so it proved. Officially, 47 percent of persons over 5 years-of-age were adjudged literate in 1841, while the percentage had increased to 75 only forty years later.⁶

Secondary schools were privately owned, mostly by religious bodies, though receiving government building grants, and, from 1924, were funded via capitation grants instead of ‘payment-by-results’. As fees were charged, most families could

⁴ Niall Ó Ciosáin, ‘Oral culture, Literacy, and Reading, 1800-1850’, in James H. Murphy (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol IV 1800-1891* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 173.

⁵ Huston Gilmore, ‘“The shouts of vanished crowds”: Literacy, Orality and Popular Politics in the Campaign to Repeal the Act of Union in Ireland, 1840-1848’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 18 (2014), 3.

⁶ K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 457.

not afford to send their children, though the new State did enable local authorities to raise a levy on the rates to provide scholarships for particularly clever children. The numbers who were able to take this up was small, approximately 2-3% of the age cohort.⁷ In the first decades of independence only about ten per cent of children went beyond primary education. Even as late as 1955 less than 20 per cent of pupils accessed secondary education.⁸ Highly intelligent working-class children in both town and country learned from earliest school-days that examination-passing was the priority. Having achieved a secondary schooling, progress to university or to professional occupations meant gaining high marks at the Intermediate and the Leaving Certificates. Young Mahoney, the central character of John McGahern's *The Dark* (1965), indicates the exam pressures:

The house exam was held at Christmas, as a trial run before the summer. It'd decide who'd continue in the honours course, who'd leave off to concentrate on passing, and passing was no good to you. You had to get high in the honours course to stand a chance in the cut-throat competition for the Scholarship or E.S.B. or Training College or anything. Passing was only good if you had your own money to go the University and few at the school had that.⁹

⁷ Thomas Walsh, *Rethinking Education Volume 12; Primary Education 1897-1990* (Bern: Peter Land AG, 2012), 101.

⁸ T.J. McElligott, 'Some Thoughts on our Educational Discontents', *University Review*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (Summer, 1955), 30.

⁹ John McGahern, *The Dark* (1965) (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 118.

Fear of failure led to rote-learning of stock answers. Literature education as practised demanded facts not imagination, and précis rather than interpretation.

Noted educator, Augustine Martin, opined that education :

has been marked by two examinations which test memory rather than thought, judgement or expressive skill. The examination patterns largely are predictable and the shrewd teacher can prepare the dimmest pupil to get round it with ingenuity, and the unscrupulous use of memory. Lines are learned by rote, 'appreciations' memorised, model essays prepared, questions predicted.¹⁰

As a consequence of this teaching methodology, and his own experience in secondary teaching and at university, Martin is convinced "that a large proportion of students coming into Irish secondary schools after their primary education are illiterate in English, and an equal proportion of students coming into the University from secondary schools are correspondingly illiterate."¹¹ By illiterate, Martin clearly does not mean 'unable to read' but that they lack the higher levels of literacy, involving expressing their thoughts and observations in grammatical English. If Martin is correct, such an audience, even a large proportion of the university-educated audience, could only respond to popular fiction rather than the demanding challenges of more literary novels.

Acquiring the basic skills for functional literacy was the concern of the national schools, but with these mastered it was only through secondary education

¹⁰ Augustine Martin, 'English Language and Literacy: The Problem of Teaching', *The Irish Times* (29.12.1967).

¹¹ Martin, 'English Language and Literacy'.

as children developed a maturity that an understanding and appreciation of literature could be taught. Obviously, given that up to 90 per cent of children did not get the opportunity for such lessons, this seriously diminished the potential market of readers for Irish literary novelists. Even this remaining small potential market for literature was poorly served. In his 1944 annual report on the Galway County Library service, Samuel J. Maguire criticised the teachers:

There is a decided lack of interest in books and reading in our elementary and secondary schools. There are exceptions, but our children, in general, are not taught at school a love of books, rather they are repelled through the way literature is treated. The transmission of the love of great literature can only be done by those who are booklovers, who themselves have felt the magic, the thrill, the power and the beauty of the sequence of words. Comparatively few teachers in our schools can do this because they are not readers themselves, consequently the majority of the boys and girls leave school with no love of books or any feeling that they are necessary in life.¹²

If literature in general was poorly taught, fiction was even worse. As Frank Shovlin records, "The novel as a genre was considered entirely unworthy of study until the 1960s."¹³ Reflecting this, Thomas Kilroy, writing in 1967, points out "Many of our teachers now find themselves teaching the novel for the very first time, without any extensive knowledge of the subject, not having studied fiction while at university. Our whole system of teaching is in danger of suffering for this past neglect."¹⁴ The

¹² Samuel J. Maguire, quoted in Frank Shovlin, 'From Tucson to Television: Irish Reading 1939-1969', in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Irish Book in English. Volume V 1891-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 145.

¹³ Shovlin, 'From Tucson to Television', 143.

¹⁴ Thomas Kilroy, 'Reading and teaching the Novel', *Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 224 (Winter, 1967), 356.

education system was effective in teaching basic literacy, but, in general, it failed to inspire and to develop confidence in its pupils. The teaching was affected by beliefs about the nature of children and of learning, and the curriculum was dominated by ideological demands of State and Church. A further problem was the quality of the teachers. Secondary schools being owned and managed by religious orders meant that clerical teachers, often unqualified, were guaranteed employment while professional lay teachers had little job security in times of recession.

Imagination, creativity and lateral thinking were anathema. Dull, repetitive and didactic instruction was officially espoused. De Valera, himself a teacher, expressed his teaching philosophy:

What I am afraid of is... that teachers are thinking all the time of making subjects interesting and attractive, and if they spend all their time at that sort of thing the mechanical routine which is necessary to go through a subject as a whole cannot be carried out. It is useless for anybody to think that good work can be done in a national school, or in any school without a good deal of hard mechanical routine work.¹⁵

De Valera's views echoed those of the Rev. Timothy Corcoran S.J., who, as professor of the theory and practice of education at University College, Dublin, became "probably the most influential in shaping the education system which emerged in the new Irish state."¹⁶ Corcoran alleged that "Interesting teaching is very liable to

¹⁵ Deputy de Valera, *Dáil Debates* 6 June 1940. Quoted in Thomas Walsh, *Rethinking Education*, 88.

¹⁶ E. Brian Titley, *Church, State and the Control of Schooling in Ireland, 1900-1944* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 99.

minimise the essential methods of thorough repetition,” and he demanded “large masses of facts” and “definite testing.”¹⁷

When the advocated uninteresting teaching provoked challenging behaviour, Corcoran responded “there remains in human nature the effect of original sin, and chiefly the resultant weaknesses of will and disordered inclinations.”¹⁸ He reasserts the aphorism “folly is bound up in the heart of a child, and the rod of correction shall drive it away.”¹⁹ The corporal punishment of children, both in the home and at school was accepted practice, not just for misbehaviour but for failure to learn, thus making no allowances for their individual capabilities. The ever-present threat of violence that underpinned much of schooling is presented in the anecdotal evidence of several memoirs and autobiographies. Frank O’Connor counterpoints evil with a touch of humour in his description of his Cork headteacher, Downey: “he combined the sanctimoniousness of a reformed pirate with the brutality of a half-witted drill sergeant. With him the cane was never a mere weapon; it was a real extension of his personality, like a musician’s instrument or a ventriloquist’s dummy.”²⁰ Patrick Boland simply narrates:

“Killer” Kelly was a sadist if ever I saw one. Not content to use the heavy stitched strap on us as it was, he made it more deadly by splitting open the

¹⁷ T. Corcoran, ‘Class Examinations’, *Irish Monthly*, Vol. 53 (June 1925), 286.

¹⁸ T. Corcoran, ‘The Catholic Philosophy of Education’, *Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 74 (June 1930), 205.

¹⁹ T. Corcoran, ‘The Catholic Philosophy of Education’, 206.

²⁰ Frank O’Connor, *An Only Child* (1958) (London: Pan Books, 1961), 110.

leather on one side and inserting three-penny pieces. This addition of metal caused not just pain, but also injury. I remember arriving home from school with my two hands swollen to the extent that I could not lift a knife or fork to eat my dinner. And that was quite apart from the pain in my ears where I had also been boxed.²¹

As Boland comments, “And we children accepted the beatings as being just part of a normal school day.”²² The Department of Education consistently refused to hold teachers and school managers responsible for even extreme violations of the rules, which were in fact reasonably protective of the child.²³

Without such anecdotal accounts, the fictive world of schooling created by Liam O’Flaherty in his *Skerrett* could seem ludicrously exaggerated. Skerrett, imported from the mainland, is introduced to his island scholars by his Parish Priest, Father Moclair with an airy, “See what you can do with them. I’ll stand for anything short of manslaughter.”²⁴ What follows is clearly what Moclair expected and condoned:

Skerrett set to work at once. Picking up a stout birch rod he had brought from his lodgings, he went to the rear bench where a group of the largest pupils were sitting. They were whispering in Irish but ceased on the master’s approach. Without warning he cut the nearest fellow across the shoulders with his birch. (*S*, 17)

²¹ Patrick Boland, *Tales from a City Farmyard* (Dublin: Patrick Boland, 1995), 63.

²² Boland, *Tales*, 63.

²³ Moira Maguire and Séamus Ó Cinnéide, “‘A Good Beating Never Hurt Anyone’: The Punishment and Abuse of Children in Twentieth Century Ireland”, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Spring 2005), 636, 639, 640.

²⁴ Liam O’Flaherty, *Skerrett* (1932) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1993), 17. Subsequent references given in the text as (*S*, page number).

This provokes a vicious brawl, with Skerrett “punching them one after another with great force and growling with each punch. In a few minutes he had scattered them. Some took to their heels from the school. Others, unable to run, lay on the floor moaning. These he kicked to their feet and flogged with his birch rod.” (S: 17) The schoolmaster announces ““Let this be a lesson to everybody here””. (S: 17)

The irony is that it is Skerrett whose pride does not allow him to learn any lessons. He has been driven out of his previous school for beating a scholar and then breaking the jaw of the boy’s father when he complained. His predecessor in Ballincarrig, a quiet man, is defeated by the island’s ways and ends up in the asylum; Skerrett “who struck terror into everybody”(S, 18) ignores all advice and the reader follows the twists and turns of Skerrett’s own route to the same asylum. The school actually plays little part in the plot, other than to provide the formal relationship between the two antagonists; Father Moclair, Parish Priest and school manager, and David Skerrett the school master. Their battles are not over the school, but are for the leadership of the community, Moclair representing an avaricious, commercial modernity and Skerrett, eventually, an unreal, idealised traditionalism. The school does, however, provide the tone of casual physical violence, and demonstrates how Skerrett’s reliance on the physical can be easily outmanoeuvred by Moclair’s unprincipled cunning. Skerrett’s standing in the school and in the community seems commensurate with his ability to generate fear with the violence of his punishments. As his position is undermined, his ability to control his pupils

wanes too. "In the school itself it became difficult to maintain discipline. The scholars began to play truant, When he chastised them with his old severity, they complained to their parents and these latter visited the school in a threatening fashion; sometimes even coming to blows with the master." (S, 126) Skerrett who once struck terror, has nothing to replace it: "His whole time in school was practically occupied in useless chastisement." (S, 181)

While Skerrett's violence was set in the 1880s-90s, little had changed in fifty years, when the same inordinate viciousness recurs in Kate O'Brien's *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938).²⁵ The gentle, enthusiastic Liam returns home holding out "hands that were bruised and swollen" (PW, 63) having been beaten with six strokes of the cane. He explains "I handed in my Latin in a brown copybook – I knew perfectly well Madden wants them all in blue copies – but Reilly's *hadn't* one in stock on Wednesday – do you remember, Mother?" (PW, 64) Kate O'Brien needs no comment: "Matt looked across the table at the little slender, silky-haired boy, holding his knife and fork with obvious difficulty, and talking with good-natured tolerance of the brutality of adults." (PW, 65) As regards corporal punishment, Ireland was not unique. Similar practices could be found in Britain, where such punishment was banned in 1986 only under duress from the European Court of Human Rights. Ireland's ban pre-dated this by a mere four years.

²⁵ Kate O'Brien, *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951). Subsequent references given in the text as (PW, page number).

The newly-independent government, faced with pressing economic, social, political and security problems, had no intention of changing the education structure beyond removing the Commissioners of National Education and establishing its own Department of Education. What it did plan to change was the curriculum. The British syllabus, designed to promote a British state, only considered Ireland within the broader context of the British Empire, and in English lessons it was established English authors that were studied. The Free State government aspired to replace that curriculum with one aiming to create its ideal Irish state. The Department aims were ambitious: "It is the intention of the new government to work with all its might for the strengthening of the national fibre by giving the language, history, music and tradition of Ireland, their natural place in the life of Irish schools".²⁶ The removal of the British school-texts in history and geography proved easier than replacing them. However, the literature texts studied remained those of the coloniser - despite the ease with which they could have been replaced by Irish authors.

Yet Thomas MacDonagh in his *Literature in Ireland* published in 1916 only months before his involvement as a leader of the Easter Rising, and his subsequent execution, had provided the academic and intellectual justification for the turn to an 'Irish mode' in literature. He argued "that an Anglo-Irish literature, worthy of a special designation, could only come when English had become the language of the Irish people, mainly of Gaelic stock, and when the literature was from, by, of, to and

²⁶ Department of Education, *Statistics relating to National Education in Saorstát for the Year 1922-1923* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1925), 6.

for the Irish people.”²⁷ MacDonagh claimed that this Anglo-Irish literature would use the English language which in Ireland had developed its own individuality, and the rhythm of Irish speech which had a marked character. Crucially the Irish mode would reflect and explore a distinctively Irish society being aware:

That the ways of life and the ways of thought of the Irish people – the manners, customs, traditions and outlook, religious social and moral – have important differences from the ways of life and of thought, which have found expression in other English literature.²⁸

This was a more liberal, but similar, call to that of Daniel Corkery who, in his *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study*, sought a literature that would “express Ireland to itself”, identifying religious consciousness, Irish nationalism and the land as the most significant of these.²⁹ Such a society was not one being invented nor one “in the making”³⁰ but one distinctively Irish as it transformed from subjection to self-assertion.

Promotion of the Irish mode would have provided a great opportunity for Irish writers, including novelists, to celebrate and interrogate this freed society. In reality little changed. It would appear that British cultural imperialism had infiltrated deeper than British political imperialism. Literature education’s elite, themselves trained to critically evaluate British books in a British social setting

²⁷ Thomas MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland* (Nenagh: Relay, 1996), xiii-xiv.

²⁸ MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland*, xiv.

²⁹ Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1966), 19.

³⁰ Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 34.

continued to act as if this was the only critical standard. Irish novels in an Irish setting and communicating with an Irish readership were evaluated as if they were British and in Britain. Secondary schools not only failed to promote Irish novels, but by inculcating British critical models, they made it difficult for them to succeed. In a system that was so examination-dominated only that which was examined had importance. Independent Ireland could have championed its own writers. Yet even as late as 1966 the prose section of the Leaving Certificate was dominated by British eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers: Joseph Addison, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, William Thackeray, John Ruskin, Robert Stevenson, Augustine Birrell and Edith Sitwell. The only writer with Irish connections was Oliver Goldsmith.³¹ However, the challenging innovation for the new Free State was not the replacement of things British, but the commitment to revive the Irish language through the schools. Most of the political leaders in the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and in the government and oppositions in the Free State believed that education in, and then through, Irish would lead to the progressive replacement of English.³² Ireland was not alone in making the restoration of the people's language a top priority. Albert Memmi, reflecting on the independence struggles in Tunisia and Algeria, observes "And the most urgent claim of a group about to revive is certainly

³¹ Shovlin, 'From Tucson to Television', 142. George F. Madeus and John MacNamara, *Public Examinations: A Study of the Irish Leaving Certificate* (Dublin: St. Patrick's College, 1970), 25.

³² Tom Garvin, *National Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 78.

the liberation and restoration of its language. Indeed, if I express wonder, it is that anyone wonders.”³³

The revival of the language through the schools was an integral policy of all political parties, none of which wanted to be accused of being anti-nationalist.³⁴ Teaching Irish was particularly difficult for it presented not only severe pedagogical problems - insufficient skilled teachers and disagreement about teaching methods – but also philological difficulties of lettering, spelling and various dialects and regional variations. All infant classes were to be taught through Irish, with a phased programme extending this to the older children. The government established a programme of training in Irish for primary-school teachers. Preparatory colleges in which Irish was the teaching medium were established and their students were given the incentive of priority in admission to teacher training college with a career, and a pension, to follow. Irish became compulsory in Secondary schools in 1928, and then in 1934 a pass in Irish became necessary to gain the Certificate examinations. Financial incentives through additional grants were given to schools which did all their teaching in Irish. Extra marks were given to examination scripts written in Irish.³⁵ This inevitably led to concentration on the compulsory examination, and to

³³ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965), 110.

³⁴ Thomas Walsh, *Rethinking Education*, 87.

³⁵ University College Cork, *Multitext Project in Irish History, The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition 1912-1949* http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Ireland_culture_religion_1912-1949 Accessed 3 September 2009.

teaching methods that prepared students for the written test, and no more.³⁶ The schools thus defeated their stated objective; to make their students fluent Irish speakers so that a vernacular was revived, not simply a language to be written or read. While criticism of language revival policies was aired during the 1940s, even “up to the 1950s and 1960s, by and large, the importance and value of Irish as a school subject were not questioned.”³⁷ By the 1960s it was widely accepted that the efforts put into revitalizing the language through the education system had failed. The use of Irish outside the school in the Gaeltacht was minimal, while even within the Gaeltacht, the decline in its use had not been stopped, let alone reversed. Despite an average of 42% of elementary school class time being devoted to Irish, pupils left with only a rudimentary grasp of the spoken language.³⁸ With such restricted time left for all the other subjects, it is little surprise that Walsh reports: “English as a subject received little attention during the period, even though it was the vernacular of the vast majority of pupils and was a *sine qua non* for the future lives and occupations of all, whether in Ireland or abroad”.³⁹ Education, in not producing students with a knowledge of English as a language, and with an appreciation of

³⁶ Rev. Séan Ó Catháin SJ, ‘Education in the New Ireland’, in Francis MacManus (ed.) *The Great Test* (Dublin: RTE/Mercier, 1978), 110.

³⁷ Vincent Greaney and Catherine Mulryan, ‘Elementary Education in Ireland’, *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (1991), 102.

³⁸ Greaney and Mulryan, ‘Elementary Education in Ireland’, 102.

³⁹ Thomas Walsh, *Rethinking Education*, 200.

fiction in English as literature, failed Ireland's readers and so reduced the potential audience for its literary novelists.

Education mattered. Despite the dire economic reality, the government did invest in the school stock, beginning a programme of repairing the national schools, which had been neglected under British rule. The government built 343 schools between 1922-1933,⁴⁰ whilst the number of secondary schools increased from 278 in 1925 to 342 in 1939. These schools, though privately-owned, received government grants and staffing costs.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the condition of many school buildings for all ages remained extremely poor both in their structure, decoration and heating, as well as in their equipment of furniture and books. Education may have been valued, but with the ever-present fear and threat, the stultifying teaching, the irrelevant curriculum and the dire surroundings, schooling was not. In 1922 the average daily attendances in national schools was 68.9%, while the equivalent in Scotland was over 90%.⁴² Titley further points out, "To make matters worse, it was well-known that about 100,000 children of school-age were not even on the rolls."⁴³ Low attendance was not ascribed to the poor quality of the schooling, but to the selfishness or inadequacy of the parents. British-enacted legislation in 1892 required attendance for

⁴⁰ Thomas Walsh, *Rethinking Education*, 101.

⁴¹ Ó Catháin, 'Education in the New Ireland', 113-114.

⁴² Titley, *Church, State and the Control of Schooling in Ireland 1900-1940*, 82.

⁴³ Titley, *Church, State and the Control of Schooling*, 82.

only a minimum of 75 days a year, allowed for many excuses and exemptions, was rarely enforced and did not apply to rural areas until after 1898.

Despite some opposition from farmers unwilling to lose their unpaid young labourers, and the Church reluctant to allow any interference with family decision-making, Cosgrave's government enacted the School Attendance Act (1926). This required attendance every day of the school year for all children from 6 to 14. Enforcement was made the responsibility of the Garda Síochána, who visited the homes of truanting pupils to issue formal warnings. Continuing non-attendance could mean a court summons with hefty fines, and a final sanction of recalcitrant children removed to an industrial school and detained up to the age of 16. Consequently, by the 1936 Census of Population, "the average daily attendance rate taking all schools into account probably exceeded 80%."⁴⁴ Educators now had an audience; inspirational literature educators had the opportunity to create an educated readership receptive to Irish novels in the Irish mode. The likelihood is, however, that authors and their readers were to succeed in spite of their schooling rather than because of it.

Patrick Pearse had condemned the English education system in Ireland because, "there are no ideas there, no love of beauty, no love of books, no love of

⁴⁴ Tony Fahey, 'State, Family and Compulsory Schooling', *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (July 1992), 379.

knowledge, no heroic inspiration.”⁴⁵ Nor was he the only enlightened educationalist who saw what independent Ireland needed to prioritize. Writing in 1923, T.F. Harvey Jacob argued:

It is perhaps the greatest defect in Irish education that the majority of our boys and girls leave school at the very stage in their mental development when they are becoming capable of benefiting by a ‘liberal’ education. For it is at the age of fourteen or thereabouts that the love of knowledge for its own sake, the appreciation of literature and art, the passion for history and romance, and the desire to understand and explore the mysteries of life and the universe, begin to awaken.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that after forty years of Irish independence little had changed. Schools still failed to provide Pearse’s inspiration, and the overwhelming majority of children were denied Jacob’s liberal and life-enhancing education.

Higher levels of reading skills were self-taught. Once competence in decoding was learned, real literacy was developed by constant practice with texts – pamphlets, magazines, newspapers and books. Alongside greater fluency develops more complete comprehension and more sophisticated discrimination. Given schooling’s inadequacy, the key to developing such a skilled reading constituency for literature was accessibility to texts. The professional and commercial classes may have had a tradition of buying print, but the endemic poverty in the newly-independent state

⁴⁵ Patrick H. Pearse, ‘The Murder Machine’, *The Murder Machine and other essays* (Cork: Mercier, 1976), 9.

⁴⁶ T.F. Harvey Jacob, ‘Free Libraries and Education’, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 51, No. 601 (July 1923), 344-5.

meant that, for working-class families, any spend on books was an unlikely luxury. The publishing industry made available inexpensive texts, cheap paperback fiction, religious and secular pamphlets, magazines and newspapers to read and to share. More expensive texts, such as complex novels, would only be available to working-class readers through lending libraries, either publicly or commercially owned. The peculiar importance of loaning facilities in Dublin for all classes is attested by Seumas O'Sullivan who noted, "Even in Dublin books are borrowed rather than bought – there are thousands of people in Dublin who can afford to buy books, but only when all hope of borrowing has gone will they purchase, and then, perhaps only at second-hand."⁴⁷ Dublin was little different in this to Britain, where publisher Stanley Unwin complained, "Most people have not yet learned to regard books as a necessity. They will beg them, they will borrow them, they will do everything, in fact, but buy them."⁴⁸

139 libraries were listed in Dublin in 1850, mostly owned by the members of societies and restricted to that membership.⁴⁹ For most people, public libraries were the necessary solution. The catalyst for the rapid expansion of libraries was Andrew Carnegie's benevolence. Having provided New York with a branch library system,

⁴⁷ Seumas O'Sullivan, quoted in Anne McCartney, 'Blacklists and Redemptions; The Publishing History of Francis Stuart', in Hutton (ed.), *The Irish Book in the Twentieth Century*, 93.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 85.

⁴⁹ Clara Cullen, "'Dublin is also in great need of a Library which shall be at once accessible to the Public and contain a good supply of Modern and Foreign Books': Dublin's Nineteenth Century 'Public' Libraries", *Library History*, Vol. 23 (March 2007), 50.

he extended the work to Britain establishing the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. Between 1897 and 1913 the Trust provided funds for about 80 library buildings in Ireland of which 66 were actually built. The Trust never initiated suggestions for a library but only responded to local requests. Consequently, public library provision was unplanned and haphazard, with a distribution around Dublin, Belfast, Waterford, east Cork, Kerry and west Limerick. The Carnegie Libraries, especially those in urban areas, undoubtedly had a positive impact. However, most of the country had little or no library service as “the rural district schemes were a failure.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the Carnegie UK Trust changed the strategy, discontinuing grants for individual buildings and instead financing and operating a number of experimental schemes for whole counties. As a result the first county schemes were established in Donegal and Armagh in 1922, with other county schemes formed later. By the mid-1930s, Ireland had a rudimentary, but operating and well-used system of public libraries, making novels available to both urban and rural readers.

A constant problem for both pre- and post-independence novelists was the widespread suspicion and dislike of the novel as a genre, and the consequent negative attitudes to the profession of novelist. The early decades of the Twentieth century experienced debate which questioned not just popular and ‘trash’ fiction, but all fiction. Shovlin summarises: “For right-wing intellectuals, whether of the ascendancy elite or of the ever growing conservative Catholic bourgeoisie, there was

⁵⁰ Thomas Armitage, ‘The County Library Movement’, *The Library World*, Vol. LXV, No. 759 (September 1963), 102.

a genuine fear that the reading habit, if not carefully monitored, might destroy Ireland's social fabric."⁵¹ Even for a woman of letters such as Lady Gregory, education had deliberately excluded novels, as she explains in her autobiography: "As to novels, she had been taught to consider them food unfit for Christ's flock; and indeed the daughters of the house were forbidden to read even the Waverleys until they attained the age of eighteen."⁵² The same attitude prevailed when, a generation later, Molly Keane could claim, "For a woman to read a book, let alone write one, was viewed with alarm. I would have been banned from every respectable house in County Carlow."⁵³ John McGahern, a product of a different class and a different time – the 1940s – reports that "there were few books in our house, and reading for pleasure was not approved of. It was thought to be dangerous, like pure laughter."⁵⁴

A further problem for the county librarian was a scarcity of customers. Even in 1962, only 14% of people living in County Library catchment areas were registered readers, and registration did not necessarily mean active membership. However, those who were active were avid readers, especially of fiction. The popularity of fiction reading in Ireland is testified by regular reports from librarians. For example Thomas Gay of the Dublin Municipal Library service, records:

⁵¹ Shovlin, 'From Tucson to Television', 137.

⁵² Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1974), 15.

⁵³ Molly Keane, quoted by Polly Devlin, 'Introduction', *The Rising Tide* (London: Virago, 1984), x.

⁵⁴ John McGahern, 'Reading and Writing', in G. Doherty and D. Keogh (ed.), *de Valera's Irelands* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2003), 132.

Let us see then what it means in books loaned and read through county service in 1931-32. Issues that year alone exceeded 2,000,000, to be exact 2,019,874. In a three years' period they had doubled themselves. If the issues for 1931-32, through municipal, county borough, and town libraries be added, the total is around 4,000,000, a figure that might excite surprise. If we concede, as we must, that much of what is read is light and recreational, and take a very conservative estimate, say 25 per cent., as representing serious and useful books, we find that approximately 1,000,000 such books were read in the year under review.⁵⁵

Rather than celebrating, Mr. Gay seems to regret that 3,000,000 'light and recreational' books were enjoyed by library readers, a remarkable number given population size and a small registered readership. His report is clear evidence that Ireland's people were not only literate, but provided an extensive reading market for recreational fiction.

Some librarians saw themselves as advocates for literature. They did want to provide quality reading, but accepted, if reluctantly, that the reader must have access to their own choice. One argued:

If the Public Library is adequately to serve its important function it must make available to its public a selection of the best in literature. It must cater for every class in the community whether the different classes be labelled "lowbrow," "middlebrow" or "highbrow".⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Thomas E. Gay, 'The Public Library as an Essential Social Service', *An Leabharlann*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Dec. 1933), 108.

⁵⁶ Donal, J. Cronin, 'The Problem of Book Selection in Irish Libraries', *An Leabharlann*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Dec.1933), 118.

Despite reservations about taste, many librarians were the novel's most influential promoters. Often enthusiastic fiction readers themselves,⁵⁷ librarians could acquire, display and recommend novels, and they did. This branch of official and influential Ireland certainly did not militate against the novel as genre, rather, it nurtured it.

Popular tastes were catered for in thousands of small circulating libraries in shops across Ireland. Dermot Foley tells how in Ennis, "There was a tuppenny library in a cake-shop in town. I read it dry of detective stories within a fortnight."⁵⁸ By the 1920s the circulating libraries in local shops were well-established, and very profitable, in Ireland as they were in Britain. These libraries were the commercial response to the fact that "bound books were not bought in the nineteenth century by *any* class. They were *borrowed* and it is this habit that made reading what it was."⁵⁹ Charles Mudie, realising the financial potential of lending rather than selling, established his subscription library in 1840. By making the newly emerging novel the mainstay of his business, Mudie helped to create a new reading market amongst the middle class, who could afford the reasonable rental.⁶⁰ His library's popularity gave Mudie great purchasing power, which in turn provided the finance for an efficient book industry to support publishers and their writers through the

⁵⁷ For example: Frank O'Connor, *An Only Child*, (1958) (London: Pan Books, 1970), 124-125.

⁵⁸ Dermot Foley, 'A Minstrel Boy with a Satchel of Books', *Irish University Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn 1974), 207.

⁵⁹ Clive Bloom, *Cult Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 59.

⁶⁰ Bloom, *Cult Fiction*, 60.

commercial exploitation of the new mass reading public. He also established the reality that novels were commodities in a market, and success by sales meant meeting commercial criteria that reflected market forces, as well as achieving artistic intentions. These acceptable commercial novels would exclude the popular 'penny dreadfuls' which were flimsily mass-produced and described by Douglas Hyde as "Penny dreadful, shilling shockers" to be got rid of.⁶¹ Ordinary people bought periodicals, books and flimsy paperbacks in their thousands in small shops everywhere. As in Britain and the United States, Irish readers enjoyed these cheap magazine and paperback productions. The ever-popular cowboy Westerns usually added a romantic sub-plot with a happy ending, thus ticking all the marketing boxes. The most popular of these authors was Zane Grey, who achieved sales of more than forty million in the United States alone.⁶²

It was light romantic fiction that dominated the newsagents, bookstalls and libraries. During this period, one of Ireland's best-selling authors was Annie M. Smithson, whose light romantic novels did, as Nicholas Allen has shown, "address her readers' day-to-day concerns". "Explicitly pious", continues Allen, "Smithson managed to explore taboo subjects such as infidelity and revolutionary violence, topics which less obviously orthodox writers did well to avoid, given the extremely

⁶¹ Quoted in Clare Hutton, 'Introduction', in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V, The Irish Book in English 1891-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

⁶² Elizabeth Russell, 'Holy Crosses, Guns and Roses : Themes in Popular Reading Material', in Joost Augustein (ed.) *Ireland in the 1930s* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999), 24.

conservative social climate of the times".⁶³ Smithson's novels lie on the cusp between the quick-read novel, usually read once-only for its immediate gratification, and the more literary novel that usually needs more effort and concentration. Her novels were escapism based on reality.

Ireland in the newly-independent years provided an active audience of readers for its novelists – the question remained whether that audience was interested in the literary novels Irish novelists were writing. Irish reading habits were little different from their British counterparts. In British libraries up to four-fifths of issues were for fiction.⁶⁴ Tastes were similarly low- and middle-brow. Penguin Books, set up in 1935 to provide affordable paperbacks of quality novels, discovered that they were not bought by the working-class, and that only 9% of the total reading public ever purchased one.⁶⁵

Many librarians, realising that Ireland's readers in the 1930s were demanding fiction, were willing to provide a range of novels to satisfy their range of readers – readers who knew what they wanted and came back for more. One senior librarian, Roisin Walsh, was a prominent advocate for Irish novelists of all types arguing:

Fiction is the most vital form of literature. It is a mirror of the period or of what its writers thought in the period. The carefully chosen fiction

⁶³ Nicholas Allen, 'Reading Revolutions, 1922-1939', in Hutton (ed.) *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V*, 95.

⁶⁴ McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 22.

⁶⁵ McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 59.

supplied in public libraries is a real contribution to librarianship and to the happiness of a large section of the community.⁶⁶

Writing at the same time, another librarian J.T. Dowling provides a reasoned critique of the value of the popular novel:

People may be introduced to better reading even through the medium of the light novel, the thriller or the wild west story. If this type of literature was not made available thousands would never know the value of books, their taste and sense of appreciation and discrimination would never be developed.⁶⁷

With the reading of fiction so widespread and popular, the continuing doubts about fiction's morality aroused mistrust and encouraged censorship. Augustine Martin, in his seminal article 'Inherited Dissent', recognises such suspicions about fiction:

Not only do Irishmen distrust writers, they distrust literature. Basically it is our educational approach to reading that has been at fault. The Irish educator is naturally and commendably concerned about the moral development of the children under his care. Especially in the case of boarding schools, he is anxious that improper literature should not circulate amongst them. Automatically, the educator takes on the role of the censor.⁶⁸

To Martin, censoring a young person's reading was prudent and uncontroversial.

While he envisaged an individual caring parent or teacher dealing sensitively with

⁶⁶ Roisin Walsh, 'The Place of the Municipal Library in the Life of the Nation', *An Leabharlann* (Sept. 1946), 55.

⁶⁷ J. T. Dowling, 'The Place of the County Library in the life of the Nation', *An Leabharlann* (Sept. 1946), 58-59.

⁶⁸ Augustine Martin, 'Inherited Dissent', in Anthony Roche (ed.), *Bearing Witness: Essays on Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1996), 97-8.

their child's reading, what transpired was not a paternal, but an undifferentiated blanket censorship, often by self-appointed activists.

Librarians speak of book selection, selection being a positive act of acquisition, while book censorship is a negative rejection. The net effect is the same – some books get to the shelves and others do not. In the spirit of the age that led to the Censorship of Publications Act (1929) formal and informal censorship became the way-of-life for public libraries. Foley tells:

Meantime, my committee was getting worse. In a mood of exaltation, inspired by the news that housewives and young people were getting dirty books by the thousand in the library, it formed a Panel of Readers, a rag-bag of fifty-two upright citizens capable of spotting dirt at a hundred yards.⁶⁹

Ireland's realistic novelists, already competing with a popular fiction that was dominating the market, found themselves further constrained by this pervasive censorship, both informal and then legally enforced. The Censorship of Publications Act (1929) is often seen as symbolic of the repressed and repressive culture of the newly-independent state. Indeed, University College Cork's 'Multitext Project'⁷⁰ argues that "Irish censorship is probably the most harped-upon feature of the first forty years of national independence – in fact, many intelligent people base, or used to base, their whole view of the period on it."

⁶⁹ Dermot Foley, 'A Minstrel Boy', 209.

⁷⁰ UCC, *Multitext Project in Irish History* < http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Ireland_culture_religion_1912-49 > , 1 [Accessed 3 September 2009].

Censorship is usually perceived as negative – a suppression of communications, and associated with censure and censoriousness. Its operation in Ireland undoubtedly became very negative, but in the context of 1920s Ireland it was seen as an integral part of a great positive – the project of nation-building. To the vast majority of the new Ireland's citizens this was not a repressive, imposed regime – this was the means towards a shared imagining of the Ireland they desired. The legislation had wide cross-party support in its passage through the Dáil. Hegarty points out that, "In fact, after countless splits and a civil war, censorship was probably the only issue which could command consensus support across a wide-spectrum of nationalist opinion, from supporters of the Free State to the Republican left."⁷¹ Censorship was normal. The British occupying authorities had operated a tight censorship of newspapers, as had the Irish Republican Army during the War of Independence, and both Treaty and Anti-treaty forces during the Civil War. Britain censored film through the producers' voluntary British Board of Film Censors, and the Lord Chancellor censored all plays. British customs prohibited publications from blatant pornography to acknowledged works of world literature. *Ulysses* was banned in Britain but never in Ireland. Infamously, among Britain's prosecutions was that in 1928 of the well-written, if overly sentimental, *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall.⁷² This bildungsroman of a lesbian's experience growing to adulthood

⁷¹ Peter Hegarty, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork: Mercier Press, 199), 184.

⁷² Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1982).

in a wealthy family is realistically told with characterisation sensitively managed, without any sensationalism, or suggestion of indecency. It was prosecuted because of its subject-matter, and its banning led to other publishers self-censoring their lists for controversial subjects, thus holding back thoughtful and empathetic novels exploring differences and similarities in the human condition. Prosecution in 1960 of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* drew international interest, and ridicule for some of the prosecution's statements in court. Britain continued to prosecute into the 1970s, long after Irish censorship had withered away with disuse.

Censorship was applied very strictly in many other countries, including the USA, where John Steinbeck's Pulitzer prize-winning *The Grapes of Wrath* was banned on publication in 1939, presumably because of the heart-rending but brutal depiction of poverty, greed, exploitation and survival in the American 'dustbowl' during the depression years. Australian censors, who banned 5000 books between 1929 and 1936,⁷³ were involved in years of conflict with Nobel Prize-winning novelist Patrick White.⁷⁴ As Terence Brown argues, "A responsible government in the 1920s in almost any country would have felt there was nothing unusual about the enactment of a bill to censor certain publications and to protect populations from pornography".⁷⁵ In 1923 the League of Nations organized an International

⁷³ Peter Martin, 'Irish Censorship in Context', *Studies* Vol. 95., No. 379 (Autumn 2006), 265, 261-8.

⁷⁴ Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1998), 208.

⁷⁵ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 58.

Convention for the Suppression of the Circulation of the Traffic in Obscene Publications. This international initiative helped re-invigorate the campaign, launched pre-independence, against 'vice and immorality' and against 'obscene literature'. Most vociferous were the organised lobbying groups, the largest of which were the Irish Vigilance Association, the Catholic Truth Society and the Knights of Saint Columbanus. Independence gave the opportunity for the activists to try to have their views implemented. As the campaign against 'evil literature' gathered momentum through organised lobbying, sermons and pastoral letters from clergy and bishops both Catholic and Protestant, pressure was put on Kevin O'Higgins to introduce censorship of publications legislation. It is quite clear that this was not a part of government plans for the new nation. O'Higgins argued that current legislation was adequate to deal with obscene literature. He argued further that it was not possible for the state to interfere or to decide what the public could read with propriety.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, to defuse the lobbyists' increasing pressure, O'Higgins appointed the Committee on Evil Literature. The Committee Report, following almost universal agreement amongst witnesses, was that the present law was inadequate and it was the duty of the State to take action against material considered obscene or morally corrupting. They recommended establishing a Censorship Board. Martin summarises: "The government's eventual decision to introduce legislation it clearly did not want was a tribute to the organization, skill

⁷⁶ Kevin O'Higgins, quoted in *The Irish Independent* (01.11.1927).

and sheer bloody-mindedness of the moral reformers".⁷⁷ Paseta agrees, arguing "there is little evidence to suggest that the public felt strongly about this either way. The campaign was largely orchestrated by, led and maintained by a clique of Catholic societies."⁷⁸

Francis Ferriter, central character of Liam O'Flaherty's *The Puritan*, thought so too, boasting:

The Censorship Bill would never have become law were it not for the moral courage of the young men who showed the government that they were determined to protect the community from corruption by the printed filth that was being sold.⁷⁹

The Puritan is a compact novel, following Ferriter around the city centre for the twenty-four hours after he has murdered Teresa, a prostitute who lives in the same apartment house as himself. He has convinced himself that this was not a crime but a 'sacrifice of blood' to atone for the evil, not just of Teresa's lifestyle but all the evil which he identifies with sexual activity. O'Flaherty charts the descent from the puritan's arrogant certainty of his own superiority, to utter madness and despair as he becomes aware that he callously killed not for a principle of purity but because of his own sexual jealousy. He condemns all around him as hypocrites and then realises he is the worst hypocrite of all. O'Flaherty's theme is not examining

⁷⁷ Peter Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands 1922-1939* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 69.

⁷⁸ Senia Paseta, 'Censorship and its Critics in the Irish Free State 1922-1932', *Past and Present*, No. 181 (November 2003), 198.

⁷⁹ Liam O'Flaherty, *The Puritan* (1932) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 2001), 37. Subsequent references given in the text (*TP*, page number).

puritanism and censorship themselves, nor simply an exploration of a censorious mind. He is charting the possibly disastrous consequences of puritanical propaganda on vulnerable personalities. For an obsessive personality the fixation on the prevention of an evil may lead to a far greater evil. As Superintendent Lavan replies to Ferriter, "these vigilant societies, acting on the best motives, might lead people into activities altogether, you might say, criminal and more dangerous than the activities they try to suppress." (TP, 38)

As a novel, *The Puritan* is unbalanced. The shock opening is the calmly-premeditated, utterly casual stabbing of Teresa. Ferriter's state of mind is reflected in his ability to retire to bed and sleep easily. From the moment he is awakened the next morning his calmness is menaced and the intensity increases through the interviews in which the dialogue is sharp and the reader's interest focussed. The extremity of the act, and Ferriter's motivation and reaction, condemns puritanism starkly and dramatically – no explanation is necessary. However, the novel continues. Ferriter asks for a few hours in which he will confirm who the 'real murderer' is. What follows is a staged pilgrimage around symbolic sites to reveal their hypocrisy – the national newspaper, the Catholic newspaper, his middle-class relatives, the priest in confession. An unconvincing encounter with prostitutes fails to add life to the narration. Ferriter returns to admit that he now knows the 'real murderer' is indeed himself – an aspect of himself of which he had been unaware. O'Flaherty as a novelist and short story writer had effectively portrayed the danger

of puritanism; however, O'Flaherty the polemicist won out, and the novel became an insipid and ineffective lecture.

Government action may have been instigated by the pressure of activists – the ‘puritans, zealots and cranks’⁸⁰ – but it had general support right across society. Peter Martin argues that the pro-censorship campaign had almost a free hand:

Many of those who would most vehemently oppose the Censorship of Publications Bill were conspicuous by their absence from the debate in 1926. While writers and artists were not specifically invited to give evidence, there is no sign they sought to do so, nor did they write or campaign at this time.⁸¹

A practical legislative problem for the government was that the target publications were almost all published outside the jurisdiction, mainly in Britain but also the United States. Censorship by prosecution – as in England – was impracticable. The publishers were out-of-reach, and only the booksellers or distributors could be prosecuted. The few such criminal prosecutions that were pursued had negligible effect on the target publications. The other British procedure, seizure by customs, was practised but was random, and its legality was ill-defined. Another way had to be found.

The Censorship of Publications Act (1929) seemed a reasonable compromise measure. It was not as draconian as opponents had feared. The Act required the five

⁸⁰ Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, 204.

⁸¹ Peter Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands*, 65.

board members to have regard to the 'literary, artistic, scientific or historic merit or importance' and the general tenor of the book, its language, its likely circulation, the class of reader likely to read it, and 'any other relevant matter'.⁸² At least three must vote to recommend a ban to the Minister of Justice, who would then promulgate the banning order. The Oireachtas debates made clear its purpose was simply to prevent the sale of sensationalist British newspapers, and British and American cheap and lurid periodicals, books and flimsy paperbacks – and any publications advocating birth control. Few people expected any controversy. The minister stated that any book "to be condemned must be really intrinsically *ex professo* immoral".⁸³ It had been expected that few books would be put forward by officials so the members of the public were entitled to nominate books. However, the determined encouragement of their activists by the vigilance groups ensured that it was contemporary fiction in English that became the main category for consideration and banning. "Between 1930 and 1939, 70% of all the books banned had been reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement*, and a further 11% were banned because they dealt with birth control."⁸⁴

Foley reports how disproportionate the activity of the censorship activists became:

⁸² *Censorship of Publications Act 1929*. Part II, Section 6.(3). a-e <http://www.acts.ie/en.act.1929.0021.1.html>. Accessed 03.05.2015.

⁸³ Quoted in Andrew F. Comyn, 'Censorship in Ireland', *Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 229 (Spring 1969), 44.

⁸⁴ Peter Martin, 'Irish Censorship in context', 264.

Month after month the Censorship Board was castigating the book as a source of massive harm to the Irishman's morals. But that was only the tip of the iceberg; underneath it crawled shoals of censors sniffing out evils in local libraries and bookshops that the Dublin Board had shamelessly overlooked. Out they went into the furnace sometimes in bundles.⁸⁵

Activists acquired targeted books, marked 'objectionable' passages and submitted them. Under pressure of numbers it is clear Board members often only looked at the marked pages. Consequently, the main safeguard – that a book had to be considered as a whole in its general tendency and its overall merit – was ignored from the start. The fact that only about 1% of banned books were Irish reflects the small number of Irish books on the market, for the evidence suggests that Irish authors were often singled out – and once banned all later publications were closely examined. Ó Drisceoil reveals, "The Department of Justice itself, in an internal memo, later admitted that the Board in its first three decades was 'especially prone to ban books by Irish authors'."⁸⁶ The Irish-Ireland ideology's drive for cultural exclusivism created a climate of opinion in which Irish writers whose work was banned were seen as worse than the foreigners, for they were regarded as the 'enemy within', trying to undermine the idealised fiction of Irish life and morals.

In 1942 Eric Cross' affectionate diary about an elderly 'old-Irish' couple *The Tailor and Ansty* was banned. Yet they were almost stereotypically the couple in the homely, but poverty-ridden, cottage that De Valera celebrated. There is nothing

⁸⁵ Dermot Foley, 'The Library and the Reading Public', *Books Ireland*, No.1 (Mar. 1976), 14.

⁸⁶ Donal Ó Drisceoil, "'The Best Banned in the Land': Censorship and Irish Writing since 1950", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 35 (2005), 147.

offensive in the book other than the occasional mildly racy remark, typical of its day – but the couple were abused by priests and neighbours, and their one copy of the book burned. Kate O'Brien had her convent-based novel *The Land of Spices* banned for the one line "She saw Etienne and her father, in the embrace of love".⁸⁷ This was enough for it to be called 'the sodomy book' by Censorship Board chairman Professor Magennis.⁸⁸ The consequences of the censorship that developed were complex, affecting individuals, writers and different classes in society differently. The Act was always intended to have a class bias. The original Act stated that "the class of reader...which...may be expected to read such a book or edition" had to be considered when a book was banned, on the presumption that working-class readers needed stricter control.⁸⁹

John McGahern disputes the impact of censorship on readers: "Most banned books weren't worth reading and those that were could easily be come by."⁹⁰ John Kelleher agrees, arguing that "the censorship has had no effect on the character of Irish literature. Every Irish author of any standing is represented on the list of

⁸⁷ Kate O'Brien, *The Land of Spices* (1941) (London: Virago, 2000), 157.

⁸⁸ Donal O'Driscóil, 'A Dark Chapter. Censorship and the Irish Writer', in Clare Hutton (ed.) *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V*, 295.

⁸⁹ Peter Martin, 'Irish Censorship in Context', 268.

⁹⁰ John McGahern, quoted in Anne Enright, 'Diary: Censorship in Ireland', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 35, No. 6 (21 March 2013).

banned books; none has tried to placate the censors.”⁹¹ For the more educated, affluent or travelled the ban could be easily by-passed. The time delay between publication and prohibition meant that those who wanted to read it had probably read it, and, knowing it was about to be banned, those who had not wanted to read it, now did. Travellers abroad or to the North could easily bring a copy back through Customs. Individuals could apply to the Minister for a licence to import prohibited copies, and banned Irish books were available in the National Library for ‘research purposes’. By the mid-1950s Fallon claims that “it was not uncommon to find banned books openly on sale, while newspapers and magazines often reviewed them regardless of officialdom.”⁹²

The primary purpose of the Censorship Act was to be protective of vulnerable readers, not to punish writers whose works were deemed indecent. Despite this intention, the result was punishment. For Irish authors censorship had economic consequences. Some British publishers did advertise “Banned in Ireland!” as a marketing ploy, but this would have only limited benefit for an Irish author. George Russell thought differently, for he argued:

In practice, the denunciation of a book by the censor increases its publicity. One of the books prohibited in Great Britain and America is James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’. In both countries the book is referred to continually in literary

⁹¹ John Kelleher, ‘Irish Literature Today [1945]’ in Charles Fanning (ed.) *Selected Writings of John V. Kelleher on Ireland and America* (Carnobdale: South Carolina University, 2002), 90.

⁹² Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, 205.

journals. Great numbers of people have read it who, but for the prohibition, would never have heard of it.⁹³

Not for Joyce, perhaps, but for some, the loss of the home market, their main market, was potentially catastrophic. Once banned, booksellers were often reluctant to stock their unprohibited works, nor were libraries likely to buy them. Worst of all was the personal pain being censored brought. John McGahern lost his teaching job in a National School, and was so thrown by the 'social upset', he "didn't manage to write for three or four years."⁹⁴ John Broderick, banned in 1961 for *The Pilgrimage*,⁹⁵ a frank treatment of homosexuality, says he would never have published it if he did not have family wealth to support him.⁹⁶ Broderick further claimed that Francis MacManus – a State teacher with a disabled child – had to modify his novels for fear of losing his income if banned.⁹⁷

One positive consequence of making the writing and publishing of realistic novels in Ireland difficult under this degree of censorship, was that other novelistic modes developed. Particularly notable was the number of fantasy and fabulist novels. A brilliant and acerbic writer like Flann O'Brien wrote the satirical novel *The*

⁹³ AE (George Russell), 'The Censorship Bill', in Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland, Censorship and the Irish Writer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 126.

⁹⁴ Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland*, 61.

⁹⁵ John Broderick, *The Pilgrimage* (1961) (Dublin: Lilliput, 2004).

⁹⁶ Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland*, 42-43.

⁹⁷ Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland*, 44.

*Third Policeman*⁹⁸ that clearly ridiculed the censors, yet was never banned. Similarly, Eimar O'Duffy and Mervyn Wall use allegory and satire to comment on Ireland under censorship in the 1930s and 1940s, disguised by Wall's setting in the past and O'Duffy in the future.

While in Britain censorship on political or religious grounds was legal, it was not so in Ireland. Expressions of opinion on topical or political issues were never subject to censorship, and comment was frequently outspoken and provocative. Fallon is adamant: "the opinion which one hears stated again and again, and which is sometimes treated as historical fact, that censorship was fundamentally an expression of anti-intellectualism, is in itself very dubious." He concludes that "The claim that Ireland lacked intellectual freedom is a travesty of the facts."⁹⁹ The advocates of the Censorship Act could not have imagined that its effect would be to stimulate challenge to their cherished ideology. The anti-censorship campaign, with O'Faoláin's *The Bell* at its centre, helped generate writing that promoted a new, more diverse Irish identity that broke free from insular xenophobia. *The Bell* and its contributors helped create an intellectual climate that was European and outward-looking. It was their highlighting of inadequacies and absurdities in the operation of the Act that led to the establishment of the Appeal Board in 1946, though this had only limited impact, for without their home market, many of the Irish novels were

⁹⁸ Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (1966) (London: Picador, 1974).

⁹⁹ Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, 204-205.

out-of-print. As awareness increased through greater contact with the international world, the Board continued to attract ridicule and scorn – with the banning of Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy*, Edna O'Brien's first five novels, and John Mc Gahern's *The Dark* prominent amongst many *causes célèbres*. By now the people had realised that even if they felt some censorship was necessary, the working of the board in practice was making the country a laughing stock. In 1967 the replacement Act removed most of censorship's sting.

Kate O'Brien gently critiques censorship in her banned *The Land of Spices*. Her Reverend Mother could be addressing censorship's zealots, not just her beloved Anna: "And be the judge of your own soul; but never for a second, I implore you, set up as the judge of another. Commentator, annotator, if you like, but never judge."¹⁰⁰ Mother Hélène should know, as the novel concerns the damage she has done to herself, because she set herself up as judge of her own father. In 1938, five months after *Mary Lavelle* was banned, Kate O'Brien addressed censorship directly through her writer character, Matt Costello, in *Pray for the Wanderer*:

[Censorship] is a confession of failure. It is a denial of human judgement and understanding, and a gross intrusion on liberty. [...] by what right do you decide that it is not for others to do so, sheer impertinence. [...] Too many negative regulations are a symptom of weakness in any authority.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*, 284.

¹⁰¹ Kate O'Brien, *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), 124. Subsequent references given in the text as (PW, page number).

Unfortunately O'Brien's determination to critique this 'gross intrusion on liberty' detracts from the impact of the novel itself. Matt Costello, a London-based Irish novelist and playwright who has had his work banned in Ireland, returns to stay with his brother Will and his wife Una in the family home-place in Mellick. His journey is provoked by the ending of an affair with his leading lady, Louise Lafleur, who has chosen to return to her husband. *Pray for the Wanderer* becomes the setting for the knowledgeable outsider to challenge the domestic, social, religious and moral attitudes of the Ireland of 1937, for which censorship serves as the keystone.

The domestic scenes provide movement and colour, as well as creating a sense of the comfortable middle-class life, accepting of the values of the state and the Church. The peace of the family is contrasted with the torment of Matt's flashbacks to his lover appearing in his play in London. The other characters represent individuals with different perspectives from within Irish society, offering points of reference for considering alternative attitudes. However, they are more interesting than stereotypes. Father Malachi argues the Catholic Church's defence of censorship, though in a relaxed and rational manner. Nell is of the new generation of university-educated women determined to enjoy, and assert, their independence. A Catholic and a nationalist, she follows the Church and de Valera, but not blindly. Tom, Nell's cousin and former fiancé, represents the middle ground. A successful solicitor from a well-respected family, comfortable with everybody, he provides a voice of moderation and detachment.

Eibhear Walshe argues of O'Brien's work, that, "At the end of each novel, love, conflict and passion are over and the protagonist remains alone, shaken but wiser, and enriched with a fuller sense of self."¹⁰² However, Matt Costello – alone as the one male central character in all of O'Brien's novels – does not make this journey to self-awareness within this novel. He arrives ready formed in character and attitude. His real love, conflict and passion are over before this novel begins. A weakness of the novel is that Costello is less the central character but more the spokesperson for the novelist's opinions. Matt's biography – horse-breeding, middle-class family from Mellick, banned novelist and playwright, London-based having lived in Paris and Spain - is so blatantly O'Brien's that his function as author-representative seems to limit his credibility as a fictional character, and diminishes the value of his critical opinions. Matt is voicing O'Brien's personal philosophy of artistic motivation when he argues, "I believe that now as never before it is the duty of those who can refrain from meddling *not* to meddle. I believe that it is as useful at present to be an individual, to be non-doctrinaire." (PW;119)

The device of the staged debate between the three viewpoints – anti- and pro-censorship, and the intellectually indifferent – retains interest because the propaganda points are made in sharp conversational gambits, without any long monologues. The impact, however, is diminished when the dialogue is abruptly stopped and we get an internal, and self-pitying, monologue of Matt's despair for

¹⁰² Eibhear Walshe, *Kate O'Brien. A Writing Life* (Dublin: Academic Press, 2006), 43.

Louise and vague thoughts of Nell as her substitute. The weakness of *Pray for the Wanderer*, even as a novel of protest, is that it lacks any developing plot that would demand individuated and developing characters. The lingering effect is of a civilised debate, generously presented. Perhaps censorship was only an intellectual entity that had little impact in the real world and thus was devoid of any credible action or plot to be explored. The novel remains an effective exploration of aspects of 1930s' Ireland, especially its portrayal of educated middle-class nationalist women, who make their own choices.

The damage inflicted on the indigenous Irish publishing industry by the Censorship Act was negligible.¹⁰³ The majority of works banned were published by American or British publishers, hardly surprising when 97% of books distributed in Ireland in the 1930s were published elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, of the 142 works of fiction by Irish writers banned between 1930 and 1967, only two – Frank O'Connor's translation of Merriman's *Midnight Court* and Norah Hoult's *Selected Stories* – were published in Ireland, and even then they were jointly produced in both London and Dublin.¹⁰⁵ Inadvertently, the censorship system might have helped the Irish

¹⁰³ Gabriel Doherty and Gillian M. Doherty, "'Some measure of vocation': Publishing in Ireland 1939-69", in Hutton (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V*, 125.

¹⁰⁴ *The Irish Book Lover*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (July-August 1930), 97.

¹⁰⁵ Donal Ó Drisceoil, 'Irish Books Banned under the Censorship of Publications Acts, 1929-67', in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V*, 644.

publishing industry by removing rival foreign productions, leaving a gap that could have been filled.

The size of the Irish reading market offered sufficient profit to ensure that a competitive book industry developed to satisfy it – but the population size of Ireland relative to Britain and its Commonwealth, or to the United States with its diaspora, meant that independent Irish publishers could not compete with these foreign publishers except within an Irish niche market. The one Irish firm that did have an extensive catalogue and thriving world-wide connections was the Talbot Press. Their balance sheet was well anchored by a successful educational publishing arm, and by having popular fiction writers such as Daniel Corkery, Francis MacManus and Annie M. Smithson on their list as well as the much-reprinted Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom*.¹⁰⁶ These authors attracted an Irish publisher because of their special appeal for the home market, but also, as Seán O'Faoláin alleges, because they wrote 'safe' books. O'Faoláin claims "there must be no comeback from the convents or the clergy", pointing out that "Some of them are not only publishers of secular books but of religious books, and most of them rely for the greater part of their trade on educational books, supplied largely to religious."¹⁰⁷ No Irish publisher could risk his solvency by hazarding guaranteed cash-flow sales of school texts, prayer books, pamphlets and magazines, for the offence that a novel may cause his clients.

¹⁰⁶ Doherty and Doherty, "'Some measure of vocation': Publishing in Ireland, 1939-69", 112.

¹⁰⁷ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Books and a Live People', *The Bell*, Vol. 6 No. 2. (May, 1943), 94.

Irish writers had a long tradition of looking abroad to be published for the simple reason that remuneration was likely to be greater. After independence, London publishers retained their well-established links with Irish literary circles and with the many authors they published. The outstanding example of this London publisher/ Irish author connection was Edward Garnett, despite his miscalculation in rejecting Joyce's *Dubliners* as being 'too slight'.¹⁰⁸ Writing for a largely foreign audience did affect the finished article. Foreign publishing houses who contracted Irish novelists were aware of their reading audience, only a small part of which was immersed in Ireland's culture. A publisher's reader such as Garnett was a constant source of advice to ensure the commercial success of his authors. Their art mattered but so did the practicalities of selling that art. The themes, characters and situations had to resonate with a non-Irish audience – sufficiently Irish to give it distinctiveness, but not so Irish that its culture, social politics or dialogue made it incomprehensible. Cleary makes a point that, "constantly negotiating between two distinct cultures", while it can be used for comic or ironic effect, is also conducive to "a habitual instability of narrative voice" – a primary reason why the "authoritative omniscience" of the nineteenth-century English realist novel was so difficult to replicate in Ireland.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Clare Hutton, 'Publishing the Irish Cultural Revival, 1891-1922', in Hutton (ed.) *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume V*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Joe Cleary, 'The Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel: Notes and Speculations on literary hagiography', in Jacqueline Belanger (ed.), *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 212.

The profit from publishing novels was itself a matter of dispute. James Devane writing in the 1930s argued:

I have heard it costs three hundred pounds to publish a novel. Four thousand copies must be sold to pay costs, and of these four thousand, four hundred at most may be sold in Ireland. From this fact it is obvious that an Irish novel is not possible today.¹¹⁰

Seán O’Faoláin contrasts this with the situation a decade later:

I happened to begin life as a commercial traveller for an Irish publisher, and I know it was most difficult to sell fiction in the country in 1921. Today things have altered in a most encouraging fashion. An Irish novel, in Ireland alone, can now sell as much as, or more than a corresponding novel in England. One popular Irish author is alleged to sell up to 15,000 copies of each book, in Ireland.¹¹¹

O’Faoláin’s optimism is remarkable given that his own *A Nest of Simple Folk* sold only twenty-six copies in its first weeks.¹¹²

His argument is questioned by the evidence of other witnesses, though regularly repeated since – as, for example, by Gerry Smyth who, in 1997, asserted, “The Irish remain the greatest book-buying and reading public in Europe.”¹¹³ Others say different. Prior to independence Stephen Gwynn had claimed, “Irish people are

¹¹⁰ James Devane, quoted in Anne McCartney, ‘Blacklists and Redemptions’, in Hutton (ed), *The Irish Book in the Twentieth Century*, 94.

¹¹¹ O’Faoláin, ‘Books and a Live People’, 93.

¹¹² Maurice Harmon, *Seán O’Faoláin* (London: Constable, 1994), 106.

¹¹³ Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation. Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 46.

very odd about books. They are, and every writer knows it to his cost, the least book-buying of publics.”¹¹⁴ During the debates over the Censorship of Publications Bill, one argument for excluding books from the Bill was that no-one read them anyway. A Committee member Professor Thrift argued that “we are not, I think, a book-reading people.”¹¹⁵ Seumas O’Sullivan in *The Dublin Magazine* claimed, “There is little or no demand for books in Ireland, and consequently, Irish publishing languishes and Irish authors cease to write or are published in England.”¹¹⁶

From the middle of the nineteenth century, it seems that readers did not need specialist bookshops, for these were relatively few. The principle outlets were the thousands of newsagents, sweetshops and grocers who doubled up as booksellers and often as circulating or subscription libraries as well. In addition, the forty-three railway bookstalls owned by Eason and Sons sold books, newspapers, magazines and other cheap publications. These stalls were “an important factor in the spread of literacy in Ireland”.¹¹⁷ For the more wealthy, the Post Office could deliver within forty-eight hours books ordered directly from the publisher in London.¹¹⁸ For the

¹¹⁴ Stephen Gwynn, ‘Irish Book Lovers’, *Irish Book Lover*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (March 1913), 132. Quoted in Tony Farnar, ‘An Eye to Business: Financial and Market Factors, 1895-1995’, in Hutton (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V*, 212.

¹¹⁵ Professor Thrift, Dáil Debates 18 October 1928.

¹¹⁶ Seumas O’Sullivan, quoted in Anne McCartney, ‘Blacklists and Redemptions’, 93.

¹¹⁷ Patrick Walsh, ‘Sources for Irish Book History, 1891-2000’, in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Volume V*, 639.

¹¹⁸ Farnar, ‘An Eye to Business’, 215.

less-wealthy there was a vibrant trade in second-hand books in shops, and particularly on barrow stalls, for example on the quays in Dublin and Cork.¹¹⁹

The Irish public may well not have been a book-buying public but they were certainly a reading public. During the 1930s, while less than one book per household was imported annually, thirty newspapers per household were imported.¹²⁰ While most Irish books were included in the import figures, indigenous newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and journals were published within Ireland and so are in addition to the imported newspapers. For the population size newspaper readership figures are remarkable. The British Sunday paper, *News of the World* alone had a circulation of 132,444 in 1926, while its Irish competitor the *Sunday Independent* had sales figures of 180,000 in 1939. Also by 1939 two Irish daily papers had circulations of 110,000 (*Irish Independent*) and 140,000 (*Irish Press*).¹²¹ With the tradition of sharing newspapers first within the family and then with a neighbour, the actual readership would have been much greater. These Irish daily newspapers provided writers with a forum for their views, and consequently publicity and name-recognition to help their sales. Brian Fallon points out “There was always a strong tradition in Irish newspapers that – good staff reporters and writers apart – their columns should also carry the views of eminent writers, public figures, specialists in various fields,

¹¹⁹ Pat Meaney, ‘The Lure of the Bookstalls’, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 78, No. 928 (October 1950), 484-86.

¹²⁰ Farmar, ‘An Eye to Business’, 213.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Russell, ‘Holy Crosses, Guns and Roses: Themes in Popular Reading Material’, in Joost Augusteyn (ed.), *Ireland in the 1930s* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), 18, 22.

academics and economists – a tradition dating back a long way.” As a result, “the inner pages might contain articles which were not only literate but also highly informed, balanced and thought provoking.”¹²² The use of such literate writers suggests a literate readership, interested in the newspapers’ cultural critics on the theatre, cinema, music, radio, visual arts and literature itself.

Weekly magazines also had a considerable market. The British *Tit-Bits* had long been popular, as was *Ireland’s Own*. These easy-read magazines contained no news reportage but simply short articles, household hints, recipes and long-running serials. Russell notes their impact:

The aim was simple – to appeal to as many people as possible, to achieve as many readers as possible. The ploy was to attract a reader’s attention and keep it. It may only have been dipped into for a few minutes a week by some; yet, in its own subtle way, it encouraged the reading habit, no matter how simplistic.¹²³

The formula worked, “For people purchased the magazine, week in, week out.”¹²⁴ *Ireland’s Own* not only entertained, but subtly appealed to its readers’ sense of identity and belonging and, without being political, was influential in the new nation becoming an ‘imagined community’.

¹²² Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, 227.

¹²³ Russell, ‘Holy Crosses, Guns and Roses’, 19.

¹²⁴ Russell, ‘Holy Crosses, Guns and Roses’, 19.

Maura Laverty adapted the style of *Ireland's Own* in creating her novel *Never No More*¹²⁵ (1942), and to similar effect. Herself politically active on the national executive of the reformist Clann na Poblacta party, her novel was not just a depiction of rural life and of one girl's journey from adolescence to young adulthood. It was a vision of vibrant country-living that could rely on its own resources, especially the potential of its individuals to create and maintain life-enhancing communities. Ever practical, Laverty provided the recipes – for the food certainly but also for the way-of-life – through her characters and her plots. The book was an immediate popular success. *Never No More* could possibly have been the template for Ireland's own genre of novels, with its loose concentration on its central character, its variable chronologies, its episodic structure, and its insertion of recipes, rural skills and folklore. However, Maura Laverty proved to be a one-off.

With religion significant in Irish life, Catholic newspapers, magazines and cultural journals flourished. Even allowing for some exaggeration, T.A Murphy, writing in 1923, is describing a considerable volume of different titles when he claims that the 'Catholic Literature Service Guild' in Limerick, "have more than a dozen Catholic weeklies on their list, and more than two dozen Catholic monthlies."¹²⁶ Prominent amongst these monthlies were *The Irish Rosary*, first published in 1897, and surviving until 1961, and *The Irish Messenger of the Sacred*

¹²⁵ Maura Laverty, *Never No More* (1942) (London: Virago, 1985).

¹²⁶ T. A. Murphy, 'The Evil Literature Question in Ireland', *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 51, No. 596 (February 1923), 57.

Heart. The Catholic Truth Society founded in 1899, reached a mass audience for its inexpensive devotional pamphlets sold at church door stalls and from 'honesty box' sales racks. Throughout the first forty years of independence these publications, and many others, were "ubiquitous in Catholic households."¹²⁷

Further evidence that the 'newly-independent Ireland as a cultural desert' hypothesis can be challenged is provided by the cultural and literary magazines that were published in the period.¹²⁸ Whilst *Ireland To-day* (1936-1938) and *Envoy* (1949-1951) only survived for a relatively few, but often important, editions, others became significant elements in the intellectual life of the new nation. Seumas O'Sullivan's *The Dublin Magazine*, founded in 1923, illuminated cultural life in Ireland through its first four decades, only closing with O'Sullivan's death in 1958. Brian Fallon provides a list of forty-five eminent creative artists, mainly writers, from A.E. and Beckett to the Yeats brothers who contributed to *The Dublin Magazine* – a testimony to the range and quality of Irish culture as it developed across these years.¹²⁹ While *The Dublin Magazine* retained echoes of the 1920s and of the attitudes of the Literary Revival, *The Bell* founded by Seán O'Faoláin and Peadar O'Donnell in 1940 reflected the much-changed society and attitudes of the later decades

¹²⁷ Walsh, 'Sources for Irish Book History, 1891-2000', 631.

¹²⁸ Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923-1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

¹²⁹ Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, 231.

The social attitudes of many clerics, conservative politicians and puritanical activists were repressive – but the evidence of courtship, dancing, cinema-going and popular fiction-reading, for example, suggest a people resolutely unrepressed. Indeed, the ‘repressive’ social attitudes, and especially people’s reactions to them, provided a wealth of subject matter for the novelists. The evidence provided by libraries and an active book market, of the literate life in Ireland in the first four decades of independence confirms Robert Welch when he declares:

It would be superficial (and simply wrong) to imagine, as sometimes has been the case, that the post-revolutionary period was one in which the Irish book went into decline. On the contrary, from a literary point of view, the years from the end of the Civil War in 1923 to the 1960s, were years in which there was no diminution in the flow of work that attained quite remarkable standards of excellence: these were the years of Frank O’Connor, Seán O’Faoláin, Samuel Beckett, Flann O’Brien, Louis MacNeice, Patrick Kavanagh, Joyce Cary, Elizabeth Bowen, Mairtain O Cadhain, and Seán Ó Ríordáin.¹³⁰

Welch could have nominated many more writers from these decades. A list of other Irish writers creating within the novel genre, and who were well-received in their day because their novels were well-written, could include Austin Clarke, Kathleen Coyle, Lord Dunsany, Michael Farrell, Francis Hackett, James and Gerald Hanley, Pamela Hinkson, Norah Hoult, Molly Keane, Benedict Kiely, Maura Laverty, Mary Lavin, Patrick MacGill, Walter Macken, Michael McLaverty, Francis MacManus, Brinsley McNamara, Ethel Mannin, Brian Moore, Val Mulherns, Kate O’Brien,

¹³⁰ Robert A. Welch, ‘Preface’, in Hutton (ed.) *The Oxford History of the Irish Book Vol. V*, vi.

Peadar O'Donnell, Eimar O'Duffy, John D. Sheridan, L.A.G. Strong, Frances Stuart, Honor Tracy, William Trevor and Mervyn Wall.¹³¹

Claire Squires argues that, "The impact of harsh censorship and repressive social attitudes was to cripple the novel-producing sector of the Irish industry in the post-war period, and to confirm the trend for Irish writers to seek primary publication – and even their homes – abroad."¹³² Her assertion does not necessarily accord with the evidence. Whatever the assertion that Irish society between 1922 and 1960s affected the aesthetic quality of the novels produced, the quantity of novels published, read and enjoyed does indicate that Ireland provided many accomplished novelists, a skilled and numerous audience willing to access fiction, and a literary industry capable of providing it.

¹³¹ For Biographies see Appendix A.

¹³² Claire Squires, 'Novelistic Production and the Publishing Industry in Britain and Ireland', in Brian W. Shaffer (ed.), *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 183.

Chapter Four: Ireland's Novels 1922-1960s

The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. Which is more than poetry, philosophy, science, or any other book-tremulation can do. The novel is the book of life. ¹

D. H. Lawrence

The decades before Irish independence were years of unprecedented innovation across the western world. The changes wrought by scientific discoveries were to fundamentally reconstruct the styles and quality of life. Inevitably, notions of the individual, social life, sex and gender relations were scrutinised, with radically different models emerging. In Ireland cultural life was being affected by this intellectual revolution, while political life was transformed from occupation to independence. The changes in Irish society to be narrated by the novels were revolutionary, while changes in the forms of the novel genre itself were more evolutionary. Indigenous writers developed two forms, the “modern”, experimental and *avant-garde*, and the “contemporary”, concerned with social questions and the way life was lived.²

After independence, fantasy and fabulism could be used for satirical purposes offering a critique of society that was the more potent because of the wit, and the reader's sense of knowing conspiracy with the author. Austin Clarke wrote three

¹ D.H.Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann, 1956), 105.

² Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), xii.

erudite satires with mythological settings that were sufficiently relevant to reality that all three were banned by the Censorship Board.³ Eimar O'Duffy wrote some realist novels including *The Wasted Island* (1919) and *Miss Rudd and Some Lovers* (1923). He is now better remembered for his fantasy novels - the trilogy of economic satires, *King Goshawk and the Birds* (1926), *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street* (1928) and *Asses in Clover* (1933). O'Duffy's use of Irish mythology in a mock-heroic style in his trilogy may have inspired Flann O'Brien who in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) also placed Irish mythological figures in contemporary situations for comic and satirical effects. Mervyn Wall wrote two brilliantly funny satires of the operation of Church and State in his fantasy novels *The Unfortunate Fursey* (1946) and *The Return of Fursey* (1948). He also wrote two more gentle political comic-satires in a realist style, *Leaves for the Burning* (1953) and *No Trophies Raise* (1956). Samuel Beckett wrote five novels, *Murphy* (1938), *Watt* (1953), and the trilogy *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1958) and *The Unnamable* (1960). The latter three take the form of internal monologues that are rather dark and desolate with moments of black humour. These writers of fantasies, satires and experimental novels could disguise within that form any critical edge in their message.

This chapter concentrates on Irish novelists who, writing in a realist mode, had to adjust both to cultural changes and to the changing society in which they found themselves. Critical depictions of Irish society were unlikely to be welcome in

³ Austin Clarke, *The Bright Temptation* (1932) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), *The Singing Men at Cashel* (1936) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936) and *The Sun Dances at Easter* (1952) (London: Andrew Melrose, 1952).

the celebratory and self-congratulatory mood engendered by achieving independence. John Kelleher points out:

It was easy to reveal the Irish to themselves as saints, warriors, and the sons of kings, as the Young Irelanders did, or as godlike poets and dreamers as the Celtic Revival writers did – and make them like it. It is not so easy to draw them as rebellious peasants, brave but muddle-headed conspirators, and small-town burgesses – and make them like that, too.⁴

Such unpopularity of theme and tone would have reduced the novels' potential audience and encouraged the self-fulfilling prophecy that the realist novel in the post-independence years was indeed a failure. Seán O'Faoláin reinforced this perception by re-iterating his judgement of "the comparative failure of the modern Irish novel."⁵ This condemnation may have been less influential if his further judgement that "it may well be that the novel as a literary form is in a pickle everywhere"⁶ was as often quoted.

The possibility exists that the constant denigration of Irish society in these decades has encouraged a presumption that a society so 'broken' could not possibly sustain the writing of novels. With the Irish short story internationally acclaimed, an irrelevant comparison is then made with the Irish novel – a separate and distinct genre. The Irish novel should be considered on its own merits, without reference to the short story or to the nature of society. This chapter considers the Irish novel as

⁴ John V. Kelleher, 'Irish Literature Today [1945]', in Charles Fanning (ed.) *Selected Writings of John V. Kelleher on Ireland and Irish-America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 89.

⁵ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing', *Studies*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1962), 102.

⁶ Seán O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', *The Month*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1949), 378.

novel, and considers the development of the genre during the decades from 1922-1960s. Three case studies of prominent realist novelists are presented.

Some writers, those in particular of the Anglo-Irish 'Big House' tradition, could narrate a world that – on the surface – seemed relatively unchanged. This sub-genre, often written with the English market in mind, is considered in a case study of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929), probably the most critically acclaimed and the most internationally well-known Irish novel written in the three decades following independence. Other novelists were conscious of a new Irishness being created by a new state. Daniel Corkery had sought a national literature "first fashioned in Ireland for Ireland, pregnant of Irish mind, of the genius of the isle."⁷ Many Irish writers were to create novels that exemplified Corkery's ideals while evolving from the tradition represented by Bowen. In creating novels of manners, they retained the style and tone but changed the context and the characterisation to reflect emerging Irish 'polite' society. Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* (1933) and *The Land of Spices* (1941) are reviewed as representing this type of novel. Others reckoned that a radically-changed Irish nation merited a radically different style of novel. As Liam O'Dowd shows, these writers determinedly narrated different communities: "the Dublin and Belfast working class, islanders, fishermen, emigrants and seasonal migrants and women, groups who were idealised, marginalised or ignored in the

⁷ Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1966), 6.

dominant orthodoxies.”⁸ After reviewing the naturalism of these novels, one such innovatory novelist, Liam O’Flaherty – who wished his work to reflect “the tumult of the unchained storm”⁹ - is considered in the final case-study by examining *The Black Soul* (1924) and *Skerrett* (1932). All three authors – Bowen, O’Brien and O’Flaherty – are considered because all three wrote a substantial number of novels, many of which were well-received in their time, and attracted critical acclaim. Their novels, and some of those of their contemporaries, are a serious challenge to the ‘failure of the Irish novel’ theory.

The English-language novel genre that responded to the new attitudes of the early twentieth century showed itself capable of a flexibility to narrate this new age. It needed to be robust and creative for, as Bradbury argues:

The established form of the novel – fictional prose narrative – was acquiring a different kind of writer, a different kind of subject, a different kind of writing process, a different kind of reader, a different social and economic foundation. It was altering in length, appearance, price, and in social, moral and commercial purpose.¹⁰

Such a genre was truly ‘novel’. For the genre to be innovative, and to encompass a seemingly infinite variety of forms, purposes, subjects and styles, it could have no

⁸ Liam O’Dowd, ‘Neglecting the Material Dimension. Irish intellectuals and the problem of identity’, *Irish Review*, Vol. 3 (1988), 12.

⁹ Liam O’Flaherty, quoted in Patrick F. Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O’Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976), 88.

¹⁰ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, 3-4.

hard and fast rules. However, these fictional narratives, to be recognised as 'novels', had to share some common characteristics that identified them as such.

Examining an individual work and considering the ways in which it is different from, and is similar to, the typical forms of the novel, may usefully structure this analysis and, through comparative evaluation, help to make an adequate response to its qualities. These characteristics can be applied to Irish novels to provide criteria for judging their literary quality. Fracturing a novel into discernible properties may be useful for analysis, but may diminish its impact as a coherent work of art. Henry James, noting how critics dissect a novel, provides an apposite warning: "A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts".¹¹ This inter-connectedness is essential. The critic may dissect, but the reader responds to the novel's total effect.

The Irish novel and the Irish short story co-existed with a strong oral story-telling tradition. The oral tradition was involved with transmitting a communal culture. Whilst the story-teller performed, they did so within the listeners' expectations. The artistic creativity was in the performance. Performance might change, the words might be altered but the essentials of the myth, story or tale did not. The audience enjoyed a unique performance of the known. In contrast, the novelist has the freedom to create an original story. The content is not the

¹¹ Henry James, *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 13.

community's, but the individual novelist's. The novel format, and the acceptability of theme or presentation to the target reading audience may present restrictions, but these are open to challenge. The principle limiting factor is the authors' talent, involving how creatively they can balance the demands of imaginative invention while maintaining plausibility, and how evocatively they can communicate their resultant fiction.

The novel form was important to newly-independent Ireland's culture between 1922 and the 1960s, in that "it evolved to formulate narratives in which social, political and historical change could be accommodated."¹² Mikhail Bakhtin argues that it is only the novel genre that is capable of comprehending, and thus of communicating, the process of change. "The novel", argues Bakhtin, "is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process."¹³ In contradiction of Kiberd's contention that the novel was impossible in Ireland because it was not a "made society" but "a society in the making",¹⁴ Bakhtin continues, "The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is,

¹² Gerry Smith, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 6.

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M.M.Bakhtin* (ed. Michael Holquist) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 7.

¹⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 34.

after all, the only genre born of this world and in total affinity with it.”¹⁵ While Kiberd holds Ireland’s society responsible for the perceived failure of the Irish novel, Bakhtin would hold individual novelists responsible for any failure to exploit the potential of the novel genre. A novel’s reading is an act unique to each individual reader. John McGahern makes the point that, “it all finally comes to that essential and potentially subversive figure alone with a book.”¹⁶ Reading is a silent and internal act which allows the reader to make of it what they will. Through the novel’s intimacy the reader can encounter events and alternative life styles unlikely to be met by personal experience. The privacy of the act of reading gives it a potential for subversion of community values and norms. Readers may imaginatively identify with a challenging character or with unconventional attitudes, without anyone realising it. Such secrecy is a threat to authority.

E. M. Forster believed, “Yes – oh dear yes – the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist.”¹⁷ For Forster the story is simply the plausible narrative of events in their time sequence whereas the plot “is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.”¹⁸ The realism that Forster was analysing in the novel has a long history in literary criticism. Aristotle in

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 7.

¹⁶John McGahern, ‘The Solitary Reader’, in John McGahern, *Love of the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 94.

¹⁷ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, 1927), 41.

¹⁸Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 116.

*Poetics*¹⁹ uses the concept of mimesis to argue that, if tragedy was to achieve its desired effects of sympathy and fear, it must portray characters and events that are not only plausible, but are sufficiently representative that the audience is convinced of their potential reality. The concept of mimesis has since been generalised and can be identified as one of the novel's own central principles. For realist fiction, representation of both character and of social milieu is a primary concern. Erich Auerbach in his *Mimesis*, a comprehensive consideration of realism from Plato to Virginia Woolf, postulates that the "foundations of modern realism" involved the representation of "the most everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context" and the taking of "random individuals from their daily life in their dependence on current historical circumstances" and making them "the subjects of serious, problematic and even tragic representation".²⁰ Auerbach also points to the centrality of class and class differences as components of everyday reality.

Characters, to be successfully realised in the novel, have to be rather more than like 'real people' – they have to be completely like themselves within the fictive world of this particular novel. Their actions have to be what this character would do in this particular moment in this particular plot. However, while being successfully individuated, some of the most memorable characters also function allegorically;

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by S.H.Bulcher (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech., 2001), 2,3,10.

²⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard Trask (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), 555, 554.

while being appropriate to the specific context of their novel they can add value as 'types' more generally and give insights that reverberate beyond the particular. Georg Lukács posited the idea that the novel, unlike the epic, endows at least one of its characters with "an autonomous life of interiority."²¹ Crucially, only in a fictional work could a character's thoughts, feelings and motivations be revealed as if the author/narrator had accessed their conscious and sub-conscious mind. While the epic deals with a communal destiny, the novel deals with a personal destiny. The focus is on the individual's considered responses to events and people, rather than simple actions and reactions. Lukács's argument is that "the outward form of the novel is essentially biographical", while the inner form is "the process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself". He continues: "the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence."²²

The realist novel tends to be marked by the features of the fictive world it creates and the characters that act within this specifically delineated world. Reality in the novel, however, is not achieved simply by accuracy in detail. A photographic copy of reality has to be brought to life by the presumption that beneath the surface image a real society exists with its complex web of beliefs, motivations and manners.

²¹ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 66.

²² Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 77, 80, 89.

Creating this moral reality effectively is vital if the fictive world is to provide a coherent context, not just of place and time, but also of causality and predictability. This concept of realism as coherent and credible illusion remains the dominant form of the Western, English-language novel.

George Eliot argued that fiction could have a more humanising impact than “hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations.” She considered the novel had an active moral function, claiming that: “Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.”²³ For Eliot, the great novelist is developing the reader even as she is developing her fictive characters. The novelist will entertain with her imaginative creation; the great novelist will also inspire. The reader is enabled to gain insights in the particular context of the novel and can universalise those insights into living. Lionel Trilling argues that novels can strengthen liberal society by presenting conflicting ideas in a way that encourages critical thinking and a morally stronger individual.²⁴ A well-written novel can present abstract ideas and principles in a concrete form by integrating them into the fictional action. In doing so it can emotionally involve the reader, though quite how attitude-changing this is can be debatable. The likelihood is that each reader will interpret the text and, therefore

²³ George Eliot, quoted in Patrick Parrinder, ‘The Look of Sympathy: Communication and Moral Purpose in the Realistic Novel’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter 1972), 135.

²⁴ Charles B. Hersch, ‘Liberalism, the Novel and the Self: Lionel Trilling on the Political Functions of Literature’, *Polity*, Vol. 24, No.1 (Autumn, 1991), 91.

the text's message, differently. Allen cautions, "apparently, literature does not influence readers to any significant extent, primarily because readers carry preconceptions to the work no matter how controversial it is. More often than not, reading reinforces an audience's previously held beliefs."²⁵ For some theorists, good fiction, "must involve an idea of some real significance for mature and thoughtful human beings."²⁶

Writing to her brother in 1834, Maria Edgeworth – arguably Ireland's first novelist – despaired that she could not get the life of the Ireland of her day onto her page. The nature of society made it impossible. She wrote:

It is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in the book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions too violent, to bear to see, or to care to look at their faces in a looking-glass. The people would only break the glass and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature – distorted nature in a fever.²⁷

Edgeworth, given her background within the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, was inevitably disturbed by the agitation generated by O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation campaign. However, the prospect of fundamental change was an opportunity for an emerging indigenous Catholic middle-class. From this group came novelists who were prepared to replace the Anglo-Irish culture with one

²⁵ James Smith Allen, 'History and the novel: Mentalité in Modern Popular Fiction', *History and Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (October 1983), 248.

²⁶ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York, Harcourt Brace-Jovanovich, 1959), xvii.

²⁷ Maria Edgeworth, *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth. Volume II*, Augustus J.C. Hare (ed.), (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1895), 550.

amenable to their class and religious traditions. John Banim, Gerald Griffin and Charles Kickham all wrote well-received novels during this restless and transitional period.

Throughout the nineteenth century in Ireland, novels in the realistic mode were popular and numerous, but received little critical praise. Emer Nolan claims that it "is a commonplace to suggest that with *Ulysses*, a work which imitated, parodied and transcended the nineteenth-century novel, a country which had never produced a major realist novel suddenly leapt to the forefront of twentieth-century literature".²⁸ W.J. McCormack supports these claims about the later-nineteenth century: "the apparent solidity of the novel tradition in Ireland is largely an illusion generated in the minds of recent historians."²⁹ Joe Cleary agrees, arguing that studies of the nineteenth-century Irish novel have been occupied "by the search for an Irish *Middlemarch* and by the attempt to explain why there isn't one."³⁰ Rosa Mulholland, herself a nineteenth-century novelist/critic, examined why the roll-call of Irish novelists is far too short and unsatisfactory, concluding that, "if it be true that the growth of the novel increases with the prosperity and intellectual culture of a

²⁸ Emer Nolan, 'Modernism and the Irish Revival', in Cleary, Joe and Connolly, Claire (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 163.

²⁹ W.J. McCormack, *Sheridan, Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 250.

³⁰ Joe Cleary, 'The nineteenth-century Irish novel: notes and speculations on literary historiography', in Jacqueline Belanger, (ed.), *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 203.

country, we have not far to seek for the reason of our poverty in art.”³¹ Mulholland considered that the poverty of the novel results from the poverty of her society, a society very different to that of newly-independent Ireland. It appears that it is not just post-1922 that the Irish realist novel is considered a failure, but that it had been for over a century before that. Terry Eagleton argues that:

Literary realism requires certain cultural preconditions few of which were available in Ireland. The realist novel is the form *par excellence* of settlement and stability, gathering individual lives into an integrated whole; and social conditions in Ireland hardly lent themselves to any such sanguine reconciliation.

Eagleton considers that “the Irish novel from Sterne to O’Brien is typically recursive and diffuse, launching one arbitrary narrative only to abort it for some other equally gratuitous tale, running several storylines simultaneously, ringing pedantically ingenious variations on the same few plot elements.”³² Yet the removal of the pejorative ‘arbitrary’, ‘equally gratuitous’ and ‘pedantically’ would possibly describe realistic novels that respond with innovation, vitality and relevance to Irish conditions. Perhaps the Irish novel made a virtue of being recursive and diffuse, and of having multiple narratives. Such distinctively Irish realist novels would succeed or fail on their own terms, rather than for not being ‘classical’ in the English realist mode ‘of settlement and stability’.

³¹ Rosa Mulholland, ‘Wanted: an Irish novelist’, *Irish Monthly*, Vol.19 (July 1891), 368-9.

³² Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 147.

The affiliation of the overwhelming majority of the population with Catholicism also creates formidable problems for Irish novelists. Cleary argues:

In nineteenth-century Anglo-American society, Catholicism was a byword for despotism, dogmatism, backward benightedness, treason and superstition – in short for the fundamentally anti-modern. In such circumstances, it was possible to believe that Catholicism and the novel were in fact almost wholly inimical.³³

The realist novel was concerned with an autonomous individual's struggles. Self-realisation as a developing person was to be achieved by the individual's own efforts. Central to Catholicism, however, was the concept of a supernatural, omniscient power. Individual autonomy was not possible in a world controlled by an omnipotent deity. Redemption was not solely a matter of individual action, but was to be achieved through this supernatural intervention. Cleary contends, "In addition, the realist novel equates 'the real' with the observable, palpable, everyday world of the senses, but Catholicism (like all 'strong' forms of revealed religion) resists the notion that the everyday world is sufficient to itself: that world, it is believed, is shot through with a higher, eternal, spiritual reality not subsumable to human temporality."³⁴ These two concepts of 'reality' seem mutually incompatible, another reason, perhaps, why some of Ireland's noted novelists of the period chose to write experimental novels, or fantasy and fantastic novels, or romances that never delved below the surface of reactions into matters of a character's beliefs. Irish

³³Cleary, 'The nineteenth-century Irish novel', 214.

³⁴Cleary, 'The nineteenth-century Irish novel', 215.

novelists who chose the realist mode were at risk of offending the cherished assumptions of their potential audience.

A further problem for the nineteenth-century Irish national novel was that it was often concerned with an external conflict between a community, the tenantry, and the elite group of landlords, whereas the classical novel is concerned with the internal and personal conflict of an individual struggling for accommodation with wider society. Speaking of these nineteenth-century novels, Thomas Flanagan points out that whereas the classical English novels were concerned with individual morality and with the civilising of society, in Ireland such interests were “subordinated to questions of race, creed, and nationality – questions which tend of their nature to limit the range and power of fiction.”³⁵

Inevitably, tensions arise when a dominant literary form consolidated in one culture is imposed on the life of a different culture, as if it were a blueprint. Fredric Jameson, in discussing the origins of the modern Japanese novel, notices, “the raw material of Japanese social experience and the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction cannot always be welded together seamlessly.”³⁶ Similarly, realistic novels of independent Ireland seem judged as if in the mainstream of English novelistic tradition. The first post-independence generation of novelists were

³⁵ Thomas Flanagan, *The Irish Novelists, 1800-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 35.

³⁶ Frederic Jameson, quoted in Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review*, Vol. 1 (Jan/Feb 2000), 58.

involved in developing an Irish realist novel from a melting pot of English formal patterns, and the realities of Irish living. Almost inevitably, the resultant novels would be uneven as writers experimented, interrogating the new State and pushing at the boundaries of conventions and acceptability of style and subject. Seán O'Faoláin argued that while England had its literary tradition and the English norm of life, "Here the tradition is not formed yet, the norm of life has not been established."³⁷ Liam O'Flaherty asserted that Irish culture could not develop because it was "submerged beneath a rotting mound of British traditions."³⁸ It would take decades for the market to establish what constituted the elements that marked a satisfying Irish realist novel when English form and Irish material eventually melded into a recognisably Irish form.

There is some suggestion that a recognisably Irish form might have emerged.

Declan Kiberd has argued:

there is an extended prose produced by Ireland from the time of Swift and Edgeworth down to Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Beckett and beyond, which is neither a collection of separate short stories nor a fully connected novel, but some weird hybrid for which there is still no generic name. But most critics outside, if they read *Malone Dies* or *Castle Rackrent* file them as novels, and yet I don't think they are!³⁹

³⁷ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Don Quixote O'Flaherty', *The London Mercury*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 218 (December 1937), 175.

³⁸ John Zneimer, *The Literary Vision of Liam O'Flaherty* (New York Syracuse University Press, 1970), 15.

³⁹ Declan Kiberd, quoted in Yulia Pushkarevskaya-Naughton, 'Comparative Literature in Ireland and Worldwide: An interview with Professor Declan Kiberd', *Estudios Irlandeses*, No.5 (2010), 135.

Perhaps they are peculiarly Irish novels. The great figures nominated by Kiberd could be joined by, for example, Maura Laverty's *Never No More* (1942) and *Lift Up Your Gates* (1946), Norah Hoult's *Poor Women!* (1928) or Seán O'Faoláin's *Bird Alone* (1936). Ireland also produced an idiosyncratic style of rambling, fictionalised autobiography. George Moore's *Hail and Farewell* (1911) had provided a popular template, in which he gave his assessment of the literary revival and the events and characters of the period in the style of reportage, while all the time fictionalising and satirizing. Readers enjoyed the irreverence, and the debunking of pompous literary idols considered to have lost the run of themselves. As Frank O'Connor has suggested, the Irish enjoy "malice for its own sweet sake."⁴⁰ Several writers tried to exploit the factual-fiction format with varying success, and in doing so provided some rollicking reads that were often satiric or self-promoting fiction rather than credible autobiography. Relatively successful in liveliness of style and interest of content were Patrick Kavanagh's *The Green Fool* (1938) and *Tarry Flynn* (1948), Liam O'Flaherty's *Two Years* (1930) and *Shame the Devil* (1934) and Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* (1958). In comparison, Oliver St. John Gogarty's *As I was Going Down Sackville Street* (1937) and *Tumbling in the Hay* (1939) and Behan's *Hold Your Own and Have Another* (1963) seem formulaic and self-absorbed.

The expectations of the established readership of Irish novels were fundamental problems for the emerging Free State writers. Whilst the most extreme

⁴⁰ Frank O'Connor, 'Is This a Dagger?', *Nation*, clxxxvi (1958), 370-1.

caricatures of the brutish Irish peasant and the comic 'stage-Irishman' had largely gone, vestiges remained because the market expected to be entertained by Irish characters now seen less as ignorant buffoons and more as endearing scamps.⁴¹ The romanticism of revival writings had created a nostalgia for an imaginary idyllic past that realist novelists would inevitably challenge but which still appealed to many readers. The new Free State writers needed to be true to themselves as both Irish and as modern artists and in doing so their "literary visions of rural arcadia" gave way "to visions of rural anomie."⁴² Seán O'Faoláin summed up their dilemma: "So, on the one hand the younger writers had their deep-rooted love of their own people, and on the other their deep-rooted longing for intellectual detachment, independence of thought, converse with the world, varieties of opinion, the whole search for what men call Truth."⁴³

While O'Faoláin agonised, Joyce-like, over his intellectual detachment, independent Ireland carried on as before. Writers of light romances dominated the marketplace. The Harvard scholar of Irish literature and friend of O'Faoláin and O'Connor, John V. Kelleher, writing in 1945, claims:

In so far as there is any large public for Irish literature it is a public with a decided taste for the romantic and the Celtic, however spurious. Twenty

⁴¹ Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1994), 114-115.

⁴² Joe Cleary, 'Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology in Contemporary Irish Culture', in Ray Ryan (ed.) *Writing in the Irish Republic. Literature, Culture and Politics. 1949-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 111.

⁴³ Sean O'Faolain, 'Yeats and the Younger Generation', *Horizon*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (Jan, 1942), 43.

years ago Donn Byrne readily outsold O'Flaherty and O'Casey. Nowadays the only Irish author whom publishers would regard as a success is Maurice Walsh, who spreads on his Celtic romance – impartially Scotch or Irish, ancient or modern – with a shovel.⁴⁴

A taste for the romantic was an understandable response, being an escape from the reality of banal everyday life in the new Ireland. Independence had come with a heavy price. The armed struggles which marked and marred the ending of British rule and inaugurated Ireland's independence – the 1916 Rising, the guerrilla war of independence followed by the Civil War – were not the orderly transition the Revivalists had ever imagined. The violence of the rupture destroyed the credibility of any sentimental imaginings of the birth of the new State. Deborah Parsons argues that “the haunting legacy of the war on the process of memory and representation was integral to the emerging cultural identity of the 1920s.” She further points out that D. H. Lawrence suggests that “the war would impact catastrophically on modern consciousness far beyond the space and time of actual fighting.”⁴⁵

Benedict Kiely supports the argument, pointing out that, “A revolution, or a war, does not make literature but it affects literature and those few years of guerrilla fighting have made a definite mark on modern Irish fiction.” He goes on to claim that this modern Irish fiction was devoted to “the local struggle that is the heritage of a politically-inhibited people, and in an attachment to the local scene that is the

⁴⁴ John V. Kelleher, ‘Irish Literature Today [1945]’, 87.

⁴⁵ Deborah Parsons, ‘Trauma and war memory’ in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177, 178.

privilege and the difficulty of islandmen.”⁴⁶ The fiction that explored this local struggle and this local scene would be a distinctively Irish fiction. Inevitably, such an Irish fiction would appeal to a limited market, and, in an English-centred literary milieu, be dismissed as insular and introverted.

In this transitional period in which the Free State novelists, mainly working or middle-class and Catholic, were beginning to narrate the new circumstances, there remained Anglo-Irish writers, mainly upper-middle-class and Protestant, narrating in the old tradition. Independence revolutionised the power base, and, eventually, revolutionised the society of the Irish novel moving the focus from the Big House to the middle-class villa and to the rural cottage and the urban tenements. Novels set in the Anglo-Irish ‘Big Houses’, the hundreds of large country manors as well as the few Palladian-style mansions, had long been popular. The ‘Big House’ offered the novelist a collection of characters who could bring numberless personal histories and problems to provide storylines, plots and themes, and all in a recognisable world that shared manners and standards. The setting, with all its descriptive possibilities, provided a focus that could be contrasted with the world beyond the gates. Time was ever-present in the ghosts of family past, the obligations of ownership present, and the prospect of ownership to come. This long timeframe of continuity was counterpointed by the dinner bell that orchestrated their daily lives. Further, this setting and the themes they offered were popular with the main reading market, the

⁴⁶ Benedict Kiely, *Modern Irish Fiction – A Critique* (Dublin: Golden Eagle, 1950), 20, 21.

purchasers of novels about England's privileged lives, but with the added variety of an Irish setting.

Anglo-Irish pride in the Big House was not shared by all. For many republicans they were the provocative markers of foreign subjugation, prominent in an Irish landscape but not of the Irish landscape. During fifteen months of the Civil War, 192 Big Houses were burned by anti-treaty republicans.⁴⁷ For Big House society, independence was a threatening unknown at the gates. Two offspring of the Big House, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin, in a shared authorship of novels and short stories were to chronicle life from within that exclusive society. The traits of characters, and themes and stresses within both Big House society and the outside world that are central to *The Real Charlotte* (1894) are again central to *The Big House of Inver* (1925).⁴⁸ This Ireland is different, but the human problems of the house's inhabitants are largely the same. The novel follows the duplicitous scheming between the remnants of the Prendeville family trying to regain their Big House and demesne from the Weldons, the descendants of their former agent. While the tone is humorous and the pace of the narration consistently quick, the reader tires of its sameness. Somerville's anger as she illustrates the depths this once proud class has reached adds an edge to the narrative, but the characters are too one-dimensional to

⁴⁷ Terence Brown, *Ireland. A Social and Cultural History. 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 99.

⁴⁸ E.O. Somerville and Martin Ross, *The Real Charlotte* (1894) (London: Quartet Books, 1977). *The Big House of Inver* (1925) (London: Quartet Books, 1973).

attract sympathy. They have had their day, and no-one really cares. The most successful and still best known of the Big House novels is Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, a novel that becomes my first case study.

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*

Somerville had had a lifetime experience of Big House living when she published *The Big House of Inver*. Elizabeth Bowen, on the other hand, was only thirty and had spent some years in Dublin and England when her *The Last September* (1929) was published.⁴⁹ Her obvious love of her family Big House, Bowen's Court in Co. Cork, recorded in her autobiographies *Seven Winters* (1943) and *Bowen's Court* (1942),⁵⁰ does not distort her judgement when in her novel she chronicles both the way of life she understood and her nightmare of the instant destruction of a home she had assumed would be permanent. *The Last September* is about the psychological impact of Big House living, with Danielstown as location for a study of the lifestyles and mindsets of its inhabitants. Life external to Danielstown is provided by the army barracks at Clonmore – the setting is 1920 during the War of Independence – which provides further characters and opportunities for social events, and whose 'Englishness' can be contrasted with a group of neighbouring Big Houses whose 'Irishness' can be

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (1929) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). Subsequent references given in the text as (LS, page number).

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Bowen, *Seven Winters* (1942) (London: Longman Green, 1943); *Bowen's Court* (1942) (Cork: Collins Press, 1998).

explored. Elizabeth Bowen was conscious of the effect of the Big House on its inhabitants. In her history of her own Big House, *Bowen's Court*, she makes this clear: "A Bowen in the first place, made Bowen's Court. Since then, with a rather alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens."⁵¹ An important aspect of this Big House teaching was the primacy of correct, mannerly behaviour at all times. Individuality was subsumed into regulated group routines.

As the novel is centrally concerned with how learned attitudes affect personality formation, Bowen's characterization has to be convincing, and it is. All the key characters achieve credibility. The men, supposedly the decision-makers, have surrendered to their indecision. The women are in control and, Bowen implies, will cope with whatever the Big House future is. The novel's cohesion is not Danielstown but Lady Naylor, who is austere yet materially generous, polite while inwardly sneering, manipulative, as justified by her belief in her infallibility, indeed quite Machiavellian. Bowen's success is to have created this all-powerful character and still made her plausible. Bowen carefully structures her narrative. The focus is on the automated quality of the social life, continuous and unaffected, and social behaviour that always does the thing right, rather than the right thing. The political reality is not allowed to intervene. She creates a tone that is light, almost frivolous, and with a seam of humour close to the surface throughout. There are passages of evocative description:

⁵¹ Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 32.

The river darkened and thundered toward the mill-race, light came full on the high façade of decay. Incredible in its loneliness, roofless, floorless, beams criss-crossing dank interior daylight, the whole place tottered, fit to crash at a breath. Hinges rustily bled where a door had been wrenched away; up six stories panes still tattered the daylight. (*LS*, 123)

These motifs of light and dark are used constantly.

The Last September is a tightly constructed study of one traditional way-of-life that focuses not on its physical demise, though that is the setting, but on the power of its psychological impact on its members. While exploring the effects of nurture on personality development has a general significance, the novel succeeds as the credible story of one girl as events change her from innocence to a maturity. The strength of the realism, for example the clear chronological events, the lively human interactions at these, the consideration of cultural differences between the English military society and that of the Anglo-Irish gentry creates an interest and an illusion of constant movement. This pace carries the passages that occur inside characters' heads, and the, at times, quite ethereal dialogue. The strong characterisation enables witty observation from several different points-of-view. The novel is memorable as a novel, and as an insight into one kind of lingering Irishness depicted without rancour.

The Last September may well have been the successful, technically adept and highly acclaimed novel that destroyed the 'failure of the Irish novel' theory. Its quality is such that it may well have become the twentieth-century Irish *Middlemarch*, so sought after by Margaret Kelleher and Joe Cleary amongst Irish nineteenth-

century novels⁵². However, the challenge is raised as to whether it is an Irish novel at all. Bowen's credentials as an Irish novelist have long been questioned by some critics. The Co. Cork Aubane Historical Society produced an anthology of North Cork writers without any examples of her work and with Bowen's name printed but crossed-out, arguing "She was English...Most of her novels are still in print due to an English demand for them...She was not a North Cork writer, in the sense of being a product of North Cork society, or in being interested in it or writing about it."⁵³ As far back as 1942, in an interview in *The Bell* she was told, "there are certain people in this town who refuse to admit you as an Irish author at all", to which she replied

I regard myself as an Irish novelist. As long as I can remember I've been extremely conscious of being Irish – even when I've been writing about such very un-Irish things as suburban life in Paris or the English seaside. All my life I have been going backwards and forwards between Ireland and England and the Continent, but that has never robbed me of the strong feeling of my nationality.⁵⁴

Seán O'Faoláin, an admirer of Bowen and of her novels, supported her while attacking her critics. In a letter to Bowen praising *The Last September*, he wrote, "I could smell the hay, the wet, the mountain-line. It's entirely Irish – if that matters a damn. (We're so sick of our Nazionalists ask for Irish literature - so thirsty for just

⁵² Margaret Kelleher, "'Wanted an Irish novelist': the critical decline of the nineteenth-century novel", in Jacqueline Belanger (ed.), *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth-Century* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), 195; Joe Cleary, 'The nineteenth-century Irish novel', 203.

⁵³ Quoted in R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story* (London: Penguin: 2001), 148.

⁵⁴ The Bellman, 'Meet Elizabeth Bowen', *The Bell*, Vol.4, No.6 (September 1942), 425.

literature.)”⁵⁵ Bowen presumed that she met Corkery’s criteria of a literature “first fashioned in Ireland for Ireland, pregnant of Irish mind”.⁵⁶ However, history had ensured that her concepts of Ireland and the ‘Irish mind’ were not shared by the vast majority of Irish people. O’Faoláin summed-up the majority view of the Anglo-Irish society that she wrote about:

They resided in Ireland – their country never their nation – so that their achievements were, for the most part, so remote from the life of the native Irish (now utterly suppressed) that they ultimately became part of the English rather than the Irish cultural record.⁵⁷

Elizabeth Bowen brought to an end a long tradition. Where she viewed her society as being broken, the writers of independent Ireland were the ones breaking it. They brought different values and attitudes, for out were going the novels of a mannerly society and in were coming the novels of a grittier reality.

The rise of naturalism

Bowen’s work may well have been closer to the English cultural record, though it was influenced by her kind of Irishness, not invalidated by being that of a minority. There were many realist writers who did identify with Corkeryesque Irish cultural life and record. Many novelists continued to write in the Victorian style, “with its

⁵⁵ Seán O’Faoláin letter to Elizabeth Bowen (22 April 1937). Elizabeth Bowen Collection, The Harry Ransom Centre, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵⁶ Corkery, *Synge*, 6.

⁵⁷ Seán O’Faoláin, *The Irish* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 88.

omniscient and godlike voice, its weighty realism, its chronological plotting, its presiding moral confidence, its role as the bourgeois epic".⁵⁸ Others wanted to experiment and develop the realist novel in the scientific spirit of the age. One development particularly influential with some novelists in independent Ireland was naturalism: "a realism grimed with factory smoke, sordid with slum-living, and full of toil and sorrow and discouragement."⁵⁹ The group of social realist writers who began their careers with the new Free State were not the immediate successors of the revivalist-era writers. Moore and Joyce had created new expectations with their depictions of working- and lower-middle class life both in Dublin and elsewhere. James Stephens with *The Charwoman's Daughter* (1912); Daniel Corkery with *A Munster Twilight* (1916) and *The Threshold of Quiet* (1917); Brinsley MacNamara with *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* (1918) and *The Clanking of Chains* (1919), and other writers were creating realist novels in the pre-independence years. O'Faoláin's generation were not the breakers of the revivalists' mould, but had the opportunity to develop the work of those that were.

Contemporaries certainly believed the opportunity to influence existed. Stephen J. Brown, the foremost critic of the Irish novel in the early decades of the twentieth century, was particularly enthusiastic about the genre's possibilities:

⁵⁸ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, 4.

⁵⁹ Carlton Hayes et al., *History of Europe* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1956), 868.

I think it is pretty generally recognised today that one of the most effective, if not quite the most effective, vehicles for conveying ideas to the general public is the novel. Few, at all events, will deny that it may be a most powerful means of propaganda.⁶⁰

Patrick Parrinder agrees: “novels are the source of some of our most influential ideas and expressions of national identity. Works of art which are enjoyed and appreciated by subsequent generations play a key part in the transmission and dissemination of national images, memories and myths.”⁶¹ Literary critics have characterised the principal fiction writers of the newly-established Free State as being determinedly opposed to the nationalist and social policies of the government and of the dominant Catholic Church. John Wilson Foster, for example, asserts:

The chief fiction writers who followed the revival – from Frank O’Connor to Seán O’Faoláin to John McGahern and Brian Moore – were realists or would-be realists who did not avoid petty-bourgeois Ireland (who could hardly do so without metamorphosis, being Catholics born of that Ireland) and were mostly anti-clerical dissidents, lonely maintainers of an anti-official ideology of individualism.

Foster proceeds to argue that the writers who were not such nay-sayers, “were urbane writers who resuscitated the English novel in Ireland”, adding, “they are the unsung talent in fiction during the Free State’s existence – Elizabeth Bowen, Kathleen Coyle, Mary Lavin, M. J. Farrell (Molly Keane), Kate O’Brien.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Stephen J. Brown, S.J., ‘Novels of the National Idea’, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 48, No. 563 (May 1920), 254.

⁶¹ Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

⁶² John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), xix.

Seamus Deane was making a similar judgement when he argued that, "In the thirties and forties of this century, a number of writers emerge whose careers as artists are indistinguishable from their crusades as men of letters against the philistinism and parochialism of the new State."⁶³ Francis Stuart has a less emotive explanation: "If politics is the technique of preserving the coherence and welfare of the community, and art is the expanding of individual perception, then it is not difficult to forecast a confrontation between the two. The politician in power is wedded to the *status quo* while art is forever disrupting it."⁶⁴ Pre-eminent amongst Deane's writers/political commentators was Seán O'Faoláin, who defended the political criticism regularly aired in *The Bell*: "We have but one reason for drawing attention to these ideas here. This is, theoretically, a literary magazine; but for a long time – ever since Flaubert and Balzac, and even so far back as Dryden – men of letters everywhere have realised that literature and politics are not two separated things. The man of letters who tries to avoid politics is trying to avoid life."⁶⁵ Literature and politics may indeed overlap, but they do have distinctive functions and form. The problem for men and women of letters, novelists amongst them, is to maintain a focus on the techniques and purposes appropriate to the product in hand. Too much polemic will undermine narrative, while too much imaginative rhetoric will diminish the argument. Several key writers had actually taken up arms against

⁶³Deane, *A Short History*, 210.

⁶⁴ Francis Stuart, 'Literature and Politics', *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1977), 72.

⁶⁵ Seán O'Faoláin, 'One World', *The Bell*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (March, 1944), 471.

the State: Frank O'Connor, Francis Stuart and Peadar O'Donnell were all imprisoned by the Free State, while Liam O'Flaherty and Seán O'Faoláin were just as involved in opposition as their fellows. The defeat of their cause, and the harsh executions carried out by the victorious government, gave a personal intensity to their writing.⁶⁶ Their opposition was less an organised 'crusade' and more a case of sporadic but discrete attacks. Kelleher applauds their approach: "their motives are artistic, their resolution, moral. They are trying to give Ireland a literature wholly expressive of itself as it is today, in the belief that good health begins with candid self-recognition."⁶⁷ These writers were determined to scrutinise and expose the society that was developing.

Joe Cleary characterises "The kind of realism that has dominated Irish writing for several decades now":

Its consistent emphasis is the social and political bleakness, the sexual repression and cultural poverty of Irish society. That Irish society in this period was indeed impoverished and repressive in all sorts of ways is not at all in question. What is questionable, though, is the conception, rehearsed in much of this fiction, of that society as a frozen monolith without either a history that would explain it or wider human resources within it that would combat the prevailing ethos in any meaningful way.⁶⁸

The focus became rural and small-town life, often restricted to a malign influence by the Catholic Church in an unholy alliance with the class of shop-owners, publicans,

⁶⁶ Vivian Mercier, 'Literature in English, 1921-84', in J.R. Hill (ed.), *A New History of Ireland Vol. VII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 491.

⁶⁷ Kelleher, 'Irish Literature Today [1945]', 88.

⁶⁸ Cleary, 'Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology', 112.

and local political 'fixers.' This relentless critique acted like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Cleary claims of Irish naturalism:

It protested against the sordid, hypocritical, petty-corruption of small-town or rural Ireland, its cultural and libidinal immiseration. Yet, while it disclosed the cramped lives this society afforded, it also consistently reduced – in the manner habitual to naturalism – that society to the sordid conditions it protested.⁶⁹

Further, the consistent bleakness both dulled the impact of the message and also alienated a potential audience who labelled the writers as traitors to nationalism's espoused image, especially in wealthy Irish-America. Cleary argues that the style and form of naturalist novels becomes self-defeating: "naturalism's formal and linguistic conservatism aesthetically reproduced that very sense of cramped ambition and narrow limitation which naturalism thematically denounced in society at large."⁷⁰ The tale was consistently bleak and the telling relentlessly dour. The continual depiction of post-independence Ireland as a repressive society has ensured that the validity of such a view is generally taken for granted. Yet John McGahern, a novelist whose careers as a teacher and as a writer were intruded upon by the conservative society of his day, dismisses the notion of interference. He explains:

I wrote always because I needed to write. I needed to – that's the way I wanted to think and see for myself, and, of course, it was the enormous generality and comfort that reading gave one. I mean that one was going to attempt the thing oneself sooner or later. But one was just going to see. One

⁶⁹ Joe Cleary, 'Toward a Materialist-Formalist History of Twentieth-Century Irish Literature', *boundary 2*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Spring), 232-233.

⁷⁰ Cleary, 'Toward a Materialist-Formalist History', 234.

never thought one would be published. I think that when a writer is writing, he's actually interested in getting his sentences right, and he really never thinks of the effect.

McGahern concludes, "I think that most writers actually think they live in a totally free world while they're writing."⁷¹

Between 1922 and the 1960s Irish society was neither monolithic nor unchanging. Oppositions strongly expressed in the early Free State years remained, but the tone was modified. By the years of the Emergency, writers, knowing the depredations in war-torn Europe and the Far East, realised how trite criticism of Irish life could seem. Mercier concludes, "The writer had ceased to demand that the Irish nation-state be the earthly paradise; the state and its people, for their part, had ceased to demand that the writer be, in word and deed, the fit inhabitant of that paradise."⁷² In contrast to pre-independent Ireland when George Moore's Father Oliver in *The Lake* (1905) and James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (1916) sought their personal freedom by fleeing Ireland's nets, in independent Ireland Patrick Kavanagh's *The Green Fool* (1938), Brendan Behan's *The Borstal Boy* (1958) and Seán O'Faoláin's *Vive Moi!* (1964) all conclude with their authors' thankful return to Ireland.⁷³ Kate O'Brien was another writer who did eventually return to Ireland, but who, unlike her contemporaries, did not see out her

⁷¹ John McGahern, 'Personal Experience of Censorship', in Julia Carlson *Banned in Ireland* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 62.

⁷² Mercier, 'Literature in English 1921-1984', 507.

⁷³ Mercier, "Literature in English 1921-1984", 511.

career there. Also unlike them, O'Brien's novels are not dominated by an anger and frustration about Ireland. Whereas occasionally their Ireland intrudes like a constant presence, for O'Brien it provides a setting of attitudes and conventions full of potential for her individual characters to explore.

Kate O'Brien and the novel of manners

Declan Kiberd, discussing Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* (1934), asked "How can you write a novel of manners about a society that has none?" He explains his questionable assertion: "Artists would have liked to employ the novel to chronicle the quotidian life of the emerging Catholic middle class, but the social conditions were too inflamed to admit of such treatment."⁷⁴ Kiberd then proceeds to a comprehensive and sensitive critique which seems to confirm *The Ante-Room* as a successful novel of manners. He asserts that, because a fully-functional middle-class only "began to emerge in any numbers (about 1934, in fact),"⁷⁵ O'Brien had to "invent an entire social world before she could report it with conviction."⁷⁶ As Kiberd admits, inventing such a world is the core of the novelist's skill. That Kate O'Brien creates a plausible world, populates it with credible figures and develops a storyline that entertains on one level and explores like a morality play on another, points to

⁷⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), 556.

⁷⁵ Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 560.

⁷⁶ Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 572.

her standing as a novelist of quality. Literary critics seem to apply back-handed compliments to Kate O'Brien's work that do an injustice to the qualities evidenced in her novels. O'Brien has been described variously as "perhaps the ablest practitioner of Romance in the English language,"⁷⁷ and as "the best woman novelist of the 1930s and 1940s."⁷⁸ Mentxaka claims, "In the last few years, Kate O'Brien has been promoted into the Irish literary canon, not because of her writing and her thinking, but because of her Catholic background. We desperately needed a token woman writer, and she was favoured for that reason."⁷⁹

Anne Haverty, who claims to be an admirer, actually condemns with her similar faint praise:

Really Kate O'Brien should not have been a particularly good novelist. Her preoccupations could be said to be narrow and were continually recycled. Bent on idealising her middle-class Limerick background and the milieu she came from, she had propagandist tendencies. She was almost devoid of the illuminating qualities of humour and irony. She could be careless or even unimaginative – in *The Ante Room*, set in 1880 to defuse controversy, the characters speak and act in the manner of the 1920s, when it was written. And her ear for cadence and rhythm was not the best – her sentence construction is often clumsy and clotted.

This analysis still allows her to conclude, "Yet she is a deeply impressive and satisfying writer." Haverty, indicting O'Brien's shortcomings as a novelist, is anxious

⁷⁷ Vivian Mercier, 'Kate O'Brien', *Irish Writing*, Vol.1 (1946), 87.

⁷⁸ James M. Cahalan *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1988), 208.

⁷⁹ Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka, 'A Catholic Agnostic – Kate O'Brien', in Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien (eds.), *Breaking the Mould: Literary representations of Irish Catholicism* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 87.

to praise O'Brien as a writer, celebrating the message not the medium: "One reads her not exactly with pleasure perhaps but at the least with an invigorating sense of connection with a subtle and liberated mind – what is arguably what literature is ultimately for".⁸⁰ This 'subtle and liberated mind' reveals itself in O'Brien's presentations of the internal psychological struggles of a heroine coping with transgressive love relationships that conflict both with the mores and conventions of society, and with her own conscience and values. As O'Brien herself explained, "I am a moralist, in that I see no story unless there is a moral conflict, and the old-fashioned sense of the soul and its troubling effect in human affairs."⁸¹

Kate O'Brien was one of the first Irish novelists to narrate from the perspective of the Catholic upper-middle class. While O'Brien's bourgeois mansions were smaller and on the periphery of towns rather than the 'Big House' demesne settings of Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane, there were other significant differences. The 'Big House' novels narrated old Anglo-Irish Ascendancy families; O'Brien's families were beneficiaries of wealth created by working-class and peasant ancestors, not from inherited land, but from entrepreneurial success in trade and commerce. These mansions, however, still kept the wider world out while keeping

⁸⁰ Anne Haverty, 'Limerick's liberated lady', *The Irish Times* (15.03.2006), 12.

⁸¹ Kate O'Brien, quoted in Vivian Mercier, 'Kate O'Brien', 98.

its family world in: "From within these tapestried walls no comment emerges, no comment penetrates."⁸²

One significant way O'Brien's novels differed from her male contemporaries such as Liam O'Flaherty and Seán O'Faoláin was that, without being disinterested, she was less interested in Ireland's emerging society, and more concerned with the psychological issues to be resolved by her individual characters. Her novels reflect her philosophy. In her memoir *Presentation Parlour*, O'Brien states that she was, "never much interested in political deviations and always concerned as to persons and their private decisions."⁸³ O'Brien's first novel *Without My Cloak*, (1931),⁸⁴ narrated the lives and private decisions of the Considines, an upper-middle class family in Mellick, her fictionalised Limerick. The novel was a marketing success, and won two literary prizes, The Hawthornden and the James Tait Black, both in 1931. The complexities of family relationships are central to O'Brien's novels. The usual family model of the novels reflects that of society at large, being patriarchal and structured through specific roles allotted by gender and age. We discover that, as Dalsimer points out, "Her novels quietly protest against the fates of middle-class women who are sheltered, stifled, and forced into prescribed roles as wives, mothers

⁸² Joan Ryan, 'Class and Creed in Kate O'Brien', in Maurice Harmon (ed.), *Irish Writers and the City* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1984), 130.

⁸³ Kate O'Brien, *Presentation Parlour* (1963) (London: Heinemann, 1963), 33.

⁸⁴ Kate O'Brien, *Without My Cloak* (1931) (London: Virago, 2001).

or spinsters who must care for ageing parents.”⁸⁵ This protest was not, however, a political protest, but an exposition of how the individual challenges, ignores or subverts social and cultural expectations in achieving personal autonomy. Kate O’Brien’s novels are not constrained by conventional relationships. In *The Ante-Room* (1933)⁸⁶ Agnes Mulqueen manages her love for Vincent, her beloved sister’s husband. Mary Lavelle, in the novel bearing her name, though engaged back home in Ireland, falls in love with the married son of her host family in Spain, and joyously consummates that love. *The Land of Spices* (1941)⁸⁷ explores Helen Archer’s internal torments concerning her father’s homosexuality, and her own reaction – revulsion – when she witnessed it. *Mary Lavelle* (1936)⁸⁸ contains, as a sub-plot, a sensitive narration of Agatha Conlan’s lesbian love for the novel’s central character. The theme of lesbian love is later explored by O’Brien as a full-length novel in *As Music and Splendour*.⁸⁹

The Ante-Room is a compact novel, structured like a stage play with its three parts resembling the standard three acts of popular plays. Indeed, O’Brien’s first literary success was her play *Distinguished Villa*.⁹⁰ Similarly, *The Ante-Room* has a

⁸⁵ Adele Dalsimer, *Kate O’Brien: A Critical Study* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1990), xv.

⁸⁶ Kate O’Brien, *The Ante-Room* (1933) (London: Virago, 1988).

⁸⁷ Kate O’Brien, *The Land of Spices* (1941) (London: Virago, 2000).

⁸⁸ Kate O’Brien, *Mary Lavelle* (1936) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951).

⁸⁹ Kate O’Brien, *As Music and Splendour* (1958) (Dublin: Penguin, 2005).

⁹⁰ Kate O’Brien, *Distinguished Villa* (1926) (London: E. Benn, 1926).

play's unity of place, a chronological time sequence and a narrow focus – the gathering of family and doctors around the deathbed of Teresa Mulqueen. This uncluttered story provides a backdrop for the concentration on the real drama – how Agnes Mulqueen prepares herself for, and then manages, the presence of her beloved sister Marie-Rose and her husband Vincent, with whom Agnes is in love. The physical torment of Teresa's cancer is counterpointed by the mental torment of Agnes coping with the psychological passion that is overwhelming her. The novel, through its descriptions of dress, manners and household operations, creates a recognisable example of an upper-middle class family. The formality and stiffness of manners and speech, and the acceptance of preordained roles, for example as hostess, or nurse or house guest, creates an atmosphere of calm order and dignity even in the face of impending death. O'Brien, however, is not interested in interrogating middle-class life or values, but in suggesting the discrepancies between the serene surface of group life, and the hidden tumult disturbing the individuals who comprise the group. The correct and staid heroine, Agnes, is all the time enjoying the mental excitement of her adulterous, but unconsummated, affair with Vincent. Vincent and Marie-Rose, while presenting an image of married bliss, are in the process of destroying each other. Nurse Cunningham schemes and manipulates, even as she nurses with perfection.

Despite the book being structured around the Triduum of prayers, abstinence and the house-mass for Teresa, the most significant religious event is actually

Agnes's visit to Confession, and her examination of conscience in preparation. This brings focus on the central moral dilemma – the conflict between Church rulings on adultery and chastity which recognise a marriage, and the reality of human love which does not. As Agnes examines her conscience, her personal dilemma is universalised: the formula, the set form of words, the whole ritual conveys that she is not alone. The reader can sympathise with Agnes's human dilemma and understand her thinking:

Vincent. No sin against him. Oh, God, there is no sin. Love happens – out of the simple fact that one's eyes can see, that's all – and in itself it is pure, it has no evil in it. Sins ring it round at once – ah, yes, because we are so weak and sensual that we cannot love and let be. But against the thing we love, how can we sin, however we offend against the world that parts us from it?⁹¹

In the climax, Agnes does reject Vincent, but not because she decides it is morally wrong, but because it will wrong her beloved Marie-Rose. Agnes is no different to many Catholics who never question the basic faith tenets, and who really enjoy the comfort and the sense of community generated by the services and ritual, but who take life decisions on their own personal ethical code. The Catholic rituals that occur throughout O'Brien's novels add to the realism of her fictive world because they were an important and very visible aspect of Irish life. For her, the rituals and the beliefs and teachings influence living, but for her central characters they do not control life, the individual does.

⁹¹ O'Brien, *The Ante-Room*, 69.

Kate O'Brien in *The Ante-Room* has created a plausible setting to illustrate the automated quality of middle-class life that disguises the passions that surge below the front of convention. While Agnes presents as a complex personality, O'Brien creates a Vincent who fails to inspire the sympathy necessary for the dramatic ending. Vincent is emotionally stunted, unwilling to fight to create his own destiny. His death has none of the tragedy of a love unrequited. The novel's conclusion is weak and melodramatic because insufficient tension has been created to justify such an extreme action as the shotgun suicide. E. M. Forster suggests, "Nearly all novels are feeble at the end", adding "If it was not for death and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude."⁹² Perhaps on this occasion the ending does seem to unfortunately condemn Kate O'Brien to be his 'average novelist' – but unfairly, for in every other way *The Ante-Room* is a well-realised and engaging novel.

A decade later, O'Brien's skill as a novelist came to full fruition. *The Land of Spices*⁹³ narrates the eleven-year education of Anna Murphy at a convent school run by nuns of the Order of the Compagnie de la Saint Famille. Anna's education was presided over by a caring but emotionally-distant Mother Superior, Helen Archer, whose own formative years provide the novel's key psychological sub-plot. A convent school, the setting of a novel of a young girl's development, enables Kate O'Brien to interrogate the impact on young people both of the nationalist ideology being promoted in Ireland pre-independence, and of popular attitudes to the

⁹² E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 102.

⁹³ O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*. Subsequent references given in the text as (LS, page number).

education of girls and women. O'Brien presents nationalism through the male clerics, who are invited to events in the convent. The message becomes associated with the messenger. Throughout, Mother Superior personifies the school's motto 'Modesty and Good manners'. Her calmly-expressed continental liberalism seems rational and sophisticated, while the clerics' nationalism seems coarse and simplistic.

It is significant that Reverend Mother is resistant to any nationalist indoctrination disguised as education, but also there is little emphasis on religious teaching either. Religious rituals and ceremonies occur, making the convent an identifiable and different world to that outside the walls, but these are enjoyable opportunities for the girls. Significantly, key events in Anna's religious induction – her First Confession, First Communion and her Confirmation – are not described, while her life-changing experiences, for example suffering Mother Mary Andrew's bullying, witnessing the snobbery of Ursula de la Pole toward Molly Redmond, and coping with her brother Charlie's drowning, are key dramatic moments. The motto, 'Modesty and Good Manners' is defiantly secular. In the convent grounds, garden and yard, nature is celebrated, and in the classrooms and in performances it is not religion but words that hold sway. Central to the plot is a secular poem *Peace* by Henry Vaughan. Mother Helen knows that her educational goal will have been achieved if Anna follows her final advice: "And be the judge of your own soul; but never for a second, I implore you, set up as judge of another. Commentator, annotator, if you like, but never judge." (LS, 284) This celebration of confident

individualism in respectful relationship with others, learnt finally by Helen only at great cost, is a universal goal, not narrowly religious. It is also O'Brien's answer to the popular bigotries of her day.

The structure of the novel appears simple. At its core is a chronological account of girl's formative years at a boarding convent during which events within, and occasionally without, the walls affect her development. However, a chronologically-disrupted sub-plot immediately develops, when the young Anna is taken under the wing of Mother Helen who, while in easy control of the convent, is in uneasy psychological torment herself because of a traumatic event when she was a vulnerable adolescent. Anna's story progresses sequentially to when she will leave the convent free to choose her future. Mother Helen's story is both in the sequential present and in regressive episodes in which her past is evaluated to excavate and accept a buried trauma that will enable her realise a future in a peace she had previously denied herself. Anna matures by making sense of new events as they happen, Helen matures by reinterpreting past events.

Mother Helen is introduced as serene, confident and in control, as she supervises the induction of three ex-pupils as postulant nuns. Yet immediately this serenity is in doubt when the reader is told: "When she was eighteen Helen Archer had, for a reason admitted to no other human being, turned her back on herself, upon talents, dreams and emotion – and undertaken the active service of God. Her rash decision had rewarded her" (*LS*, 18). This mystery event which "chilled more

than she knew by the shock" is alluded to throughout her reminiscences of her previous convent-postings. The unspoken hangs over the plot suggesting that, as in *The Ante-Room*, the real story is below the surface. The device is effective. The climactic scene depicts Helen running home to gather some roses for the chapel and to take the chance of a word with Daddy:

She looked into the room.

Two people were there. But neither saw her; neither felt her shadow as it froze across the sun.

She turned and descended the stairs. She left the garden and went on down the curve of *Rue Saint Isidore*.

She had no objective and no knowledge of what she was doing. She did not see external things. She saw *Etienne* and her father in the embrace of love. (*LS*, 157)

O'Brien's writing is calculated. In the build-up, the sentences swing along happily disguising the shock to come. The revelation produces staccato sentences that recreate the shock, Helen's inability to breathe. The shock prevents immediate recognition; her brain takes moments to comprehend the incomprehensible. The placing of 'the embrace of love' completes an effective crescendo. *The Land of Spices* is a remarkably vibrant novel given its setting and its story. Life is meticulously lived through a series of micro-dramas, trivial in themselves but so well presented by O'Brien they often seem starkly dramatic. The large cast of characters come alive, even though they also serve as types, for example the inadequate father, the down-trodden mother, the 'nasty' nun, the kindly, elderly nun, and more. Mother Helen's

story and her characterisation, makes this a technically adept novel that imaginatively narrates how nobility of personality can overcome potential disaster.

Anne Fogarty argues that, “by bringing the *Bildungsroman*, a literary genre which is a product of high culture, into contact with women’s romance, a form of popular fiction, O’Brien creates an idiosyncratic literary space of her own.”⁹⁴ This choice provided the potential of a ready sales market for romance, with the literary respectability of the *bildungsroman*. O’Brien’s novels did not sell just because of their form. They were successful because they were well-written examples of that form. The weight of critical comment on Kate O’Brien seems to recognise her as a pioneer and as a courageous and innovative writer rather than the accomplished novelist she was. O’Brien’s biographer, Eibhear Walshe, argues convincingly that “She created novels that were deceptively traditional in form but radical in content – each novel a Trojan horse smuggling in forbidden topics, such as adultery, lesbianism and venereal disease through the medium of her civilised, graceful narratives”.⁹⁵ Her novels were indeed civilised and graceful, which made her exploration of these sexual taboos possible in the conservative moral climate of their day. They also provide evidence of her skill in creating complex fictional worlds in which significant universal themes of human sexual choices are graphically illustrated through storylines that engage the reader. Her central characters are both plausible

⁹⁴ Anne Fogarty, “‘The Business of Attachment’ Romance and Desire in the Novels of Kate O’Brien”, in Eibhear Walshe (ed.), *Ordinary People Dancing* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 104.

⁹⁵ Eibhear Walshe, *Kate O’Brien: A Writing Life* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 2.

and sufficiently sympathetic to symbolise the taboo being considered and to elicit a compassionate response. The settings are clearly depicted, without intruding. The action episodes are usually purposeful to the character's development, but fit rather too neatly, as if ticked off on the novelist's storyboard. The storyboard proved vital for O'Brien's contemporary, Liam O'Flaherty, whose *The Informer* (1925) gained a Hollywood contract. Whereas Kate O'Brien precisely constructed action sequences, in Liam O'Flaherty's novels visual scenes, crucial for the film studio, burst one after another onto the page.

Liam O'Flaherty and melodrama

Much of the fiction of the first three decades of independence was directly "concerned with the kind of society that emerges" and "with the role of the individual in that society."⁹⁶ Liam O'Flaherty was different. John Zneimer observes that "O'Flaherty's main concern is not for man in society and set against society's norms but for man cut off from society, for whom society offers no rationale."⁹⁷ O'Flaherty's novels are less social realism, more psychological studies, in which the hero does not seek an accommodation with his society, but an accommodation with himself. The literary mode of the novel in the early decades of the twentieth century

⁹⁶ Maurice Harmon and Roger McHugh, *A Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature from its origins to the Present Day* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1982), 247.

⁹⁷ Zneimer, *The Literary Vision of Liam O'Flaherty*, xii.

was impersonal and detached, rather than passionate and instinctive. O'Flaherty had argued in a letter to the *Irish Statesman* in 1924 that Irish literature had to be different, for:

Ours is the wild tumult of the unchained storm, the tumult of the army on the march, clashing its cymbals, rioting with excess of energy. Need we be ashamed of it?⁹⁸

In most of his novels O'Flaherty narrated without shame 'the unchained storm'.

Michael D. Higgins argues that O'Flaherty as an artist is in a confrontation between the exaggerated romanticism of the literary revival writers, and "an uncritical if enthusiastic celebration of excess in deeds and word."⁹⁹ Excess of emotion and fury, and excess of nature, destructive and elemental, characterise *The Black Soul* (1924)¹⁰⁰, a novel that records a year of recuperation in a cabin on the island of Inverara for a war-damaged ex-soldier. The cabin is the setting of the unconsummated marriage between Red John and Little Mary. The novel begins in winter when the ex-soldier is in the depths of his dark night of the soul. As the seasons develop into spring and summer so does his relationship with Little Mary, concluding with their autumn elopement into a more mellow, but still precarious, future. Red John has no future: he is driven to death by his own demons, and the

⁹⁸ Liam O'Flaherty, quoted in Patrick F. Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976), 88.

⁹⁹ Michael D. Higgins, 'Liam O'Flaherty & Peadar O'Donnell – Images of Rural Community', *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1985), 42.

¹⁰⁰ Liam O'Flaherty, *The Black Soul* (1924) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928). Subsequent references given in the text as (BS, page number).

impossible situation the lovers have created for him.

Human mental torment is graphically illustrated. The central figure, Fergus O'Connor, is known throughout as the Stranger, strange in mental state and in behaviour, and forever a stranger in the excluding Inverara community. In *The Black Soul* as in other O'Flaherty novels, for example Gypo Nolan in *The Informer* (1925), Michael McDara in *The Assassin* (1928) or Francis Ferriter in *The Puritan* (1932), the central figure is so dominant that they become the novel, and the novel's "action whirls faster and faster around that centre with a centrifugal force that dazzles the eye."¹⁰¹ The Stranger arrives with madness forced on him by the evil of war, shell-shocked into a physical and mental wreck. However, he is not simply a victim of external damage, he was already carrying his own demons, as his flashbacks to his childhood and family reveal. (BS, 27-34) His body battles with his mind, and his mind grapples with his own internal fiends.

The plot develops in simple situations around the village as the Stranger ventures out of himself, out of the cabin and out into this little world. Little Mary, who could never love the small-minded people of this world, falls for the Stranger. The love story that develops is as tormented as the characters themselves. As the Stranger and Little Mary begin to find companionship, love and love-making heals their distress. In direct contrast, Red John suffers greater rejection, more public and brutal. Their growing calm is counterpointed by his increasing rage. They are saved and escape, and he is driven mad and to death; as if the black soul has left one

¹⁰¹ O'Faoláin, 'Don Quixote O'Flaherty', 171.

character only because it has invaded another. The scene when Red John is driven from instability to insanity is a melodramatic crescendo, but the force of feeling in O'Flaherty's diction and imagery is unforgettable. Red John strips naked and suddenly can look at himself in an out-of-body moment. His body seems to shrink and fall to pieces, he trembles violently jumping from foot-to-foot, then he loses the use of his limbs and his head bangs rhythmically against the wall. The Stranger moves to grasp him by the throat:

Then Red John yelled and tore his jaws wide open to the utmost with his two hands, as if trying to vomit his fear in the intensity of the yell. He drew up his right leg to his buttock and struck at the wall with its sole. "Go away," he screamed, clawing the air, "go away; you are going to kill me. Help me! (BS, 225)

Characterisation is limited to the central figures. Few personalities stand out from the community sameness. Even as the story develops, the islanders are not individuated but seem to act as if programmed: drinking, working, gossiping, delighting in a life-taking shipwreck and fighting over the spoils. They are far from the idealised westerners of the literary revival, indeed O'Flaherty uses the pre-revival simian image, "In their excitement and fear their ape likeness was apparent." (BS, 233) War has inflicted one kind of human torture, these ordinary people can inflict another similarly devastating.

The educated O'Daly and his daughter Kathleen are exceptions to the faceless mass, developed sufficiently by O'Flaherty to contrast with the poverty of the lives around them. Kathleen represents the new woman, pious and dutiful, the cultured aesthete to contrast with the sensual Little Mary. Having Kathleen also love the

Stranger is a crude device, an unnecessary and implausible diversion from the Stranger/Little Mary plot. Other characters are used to make a point or create an interlude and then discarded. The ludicrous Doctor allows O'Flaherty to lighten the gloom with a short humorous episode (*BS*, 74-81). The curate presents an opportunity for comment on religion and a quick pen-portrait of a handsome cleric with the physique of a prize-fighter and the timidity of an O'Flaherty nun (*BS*, 123-4). Creating the backdrop for this psychological rollercoaster is the wildness of Inverara with its rugged landscape and its elemental storms. The writing is vivid and catches the spirit of place and people. In *The Black Soul* the landscape has an overwhelming presence. The impact of the evocations of landscape and weather is eventually diminished because it lacks variety, always screaming with energy. It can be rather self-indulgent, with layer after layer being added for effect. One example is the opening descriptions of Spring:

It was no gentle languorous wind. It was sharp and biting. It beat the earth with thin steel rods. It throbbed with energy. It hardened the muscles. It sent the blood rushing from the heart to the limbs. It made the teeth chatter. It aroused passion. It was full of cold lust. It poured into every crevice of the crags, catching everything in its harsh grip. It poured into every cabin to rouse the people. It made the horses neigh and gallop, as it tore the shaggy winter hair from their backs. It was the lashing wind of spring. (*BS*, 112)

Perhaps Edward Garnett takes some responsibility, for O'Flaherty was to say: "We practically wrote *The Black Soul* together. I remember his burning about 30,000 words of manuscript upon which I had spent an entire month. I could have shot him".¹⁰²

¹⁰² Edward Garnett, quoted in Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, 79. Edward Garnett was O'Flaherty's reader at Jonathan Cape and his most important early patron.

Garnett encouraged him to develop his poetic streak, which could explain the exuberance of some of the descriptive passages.¹⁰³

The primary focus of the novel is the cause, manifestation and resolution of intellectual torment. A secondary theme is the mental torment arising from physical desire. O'Flaherty at one point considered marketing *The Black Soul* as a pornographic novel.¹⁰⁴ Male sexuality is presented in the Stranger's flashbacks to his adolescent fantasies and experiences, and in his desires aroused in the close proximity of the cottage. His lust for Little Mary is one more factor in his self-disgust, less at the thoughts themselves, more that she is an inferior being. His lust progresses from all women to one woman, and then from lust to love, so that the Stranger who arrived being destroyed by his internal passion leaves recovering because he is no longer totally self-obsessed. The book's climax seems too convenient. Little Mary needs physical freedom from Red John. The Stranger's mental freedom needs escape from Red John's madness, for the Stranger knows, "That he himself was mad like Red John. It was like a photograph of himself taken during a nightmare" (BS, 223). As the community search for Red John, the melodrama mounts as O'Flaherty maximises the visual opportunities: Red John drops dead, the waves turn somersaults, the seagulls rise up screaming, gullies of wind eddy in and out of the cliffs, the sun breaks through the clouds, "the peasants

¹⁰³ Hedda Friberg, *An Old Order and a New. The Split World of Liam O'Flaherty's Novels* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1996), 70.

¹⁰⁴ Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, 132.

crossed themselves and said, "God save us from the magic wind", and the Stranger held his hands aloft (*BS*, 247). From the viewpoint of the traditional English-language novel this is over-melodramatic and somewhat ludicrous. But from O'Flaherty's belief that the Irish novel should have a distinctively Irish tone and style, and that Irish literature "is the wild tumult of the unchained storm" that should be "rioting with excess of energy"¹⁰⁵ it is effective and appropriate.

The Black Soul is an unremitting psychological study, with a minimal plot. The Stranger inhabits two destructive worlds. The first is inside his own mind where anger rages. He is tormented with words. The other is the world of Inverara with its violent storms, perilous landscape and cruel islanders. The world at war was a world temporarily gone mad: the world of Inverara is permanently at war with nature and with fellow man. The prose style is vivid and startlingly clear, such that when the Stranger looks down at the raging sea from the cliff precipice, the reader can also see the internal abyss that he permanently confronts. *The Black Soul* is brazenly melodramatic, yet while there is an excess of excess, it remains both readable and memorable. Richard Fallis argues of O'Flaherty's work that "the novels are marred by outrageous melodrama."¹⁰⁶ This melodrama was not a by-product of O'Flaherty's style, it was at the core. He deliberately chose the melodramatic style, characterised by sensational incidents and violent appeals to the emotions to

¹⁰⁵ Liam O'Flaherty, quoted in Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, 88.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Fallis, *The Irish Renaissance. An Introduction to Anglo-Irish Literature* ((Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1978), 210.

emphasise the extremity of the individual's conflict often with himself, as in *The Black Soul*, *The Fugitive*, *The Puritan* or *Skerrett* (1932).¹⁰⁷

Skerrett is a finely-focussed, and very melodramatic, study of the title's hero as he struggles with his inner demons in responding to the crises that will eventually overwhelm him.¹⁰⁸ The setting is precise in time and place – the 1880s into the 1890s on Nara, a fictionalised Inis Mór island. However, the society depicted contains all the elements still active in 1932 when the book was published, giving its issues a greater relevance. The island's society is self-contained, just like the independent Ireland of 1932. The poorer peasants and fishermen are scattered around the island while the emerging and established Catholic middle-class of publicans, shop owners and traders, look to the main town of Ardglass. This is a structured society though one in a constant state of flux as people hustle for position and wealth. At the pinnacle stands Father Moclair, who had "the condescension of a king" (S, 29) a "royal carriage" ((S, 62) and was "undisputed ruler of the island" (S, 154). This society is not that of the literary Revivalists with their poor but contented peasant stereotypes. This society is vibrant but malleable, with divisions within as well as between social classes, and containing strong individuals.

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 659 .

¹⁰⁸ Liam O'Flaherty, *Skerrett* (1932) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1993). Subsequent references given in the text as (S, page number).

Patrick Sheeran claims that O'Flaherty was scarred by growing up in a "broken world and its broken traditions". These Sheeran delineates as the old tradition, 'the natives', being encroached upon by the new, 'the civilised' characterised as materialistic and self-seeking.¹⁰⁹ Such a dichotomy was not unique to O'Flaherty's world for it was the struggle of the age: the worldwide contest as science and modernity sought an accommodation with established tradition. On his *Nara*, O'Flaherty explored this changing world, depicting not the result of the contest but the dynamics of a world in change. For clarity, Moclair becomes the embodiment of modernity while eventually Skerrett comes to represent the old ways. Skerrett is not simply representational, however, for he is a deceptively complex character. Though he presents as thuggish and reactive, he is not devoid of later reflection, though this seems more driven by anger and pride than by reason or self-awareness. However, he is the one character who does change. He arrives as Moclair's placeman to bring civilisation to the outlying islanders. His methods are brutal, but in that elemental world they achieve success and he gains local respect. His personality changes with the birth of his son; he becomes teetotal and devout, and even treats his lumpen wife with some little affection. With his little victories his resentment fades and gratitude overwhelms him, culminating in an exaggerated fawning over Moclair:

It is still told among the older people on the island, how one day in the church at Tobar Milis, when Father Moclair was walking down the aisle to the

¹⁰⁹ Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, 32, 42-3.

confessional before Mass, Skerrett rushed out of his pew, knelt on both knees and wiped a speck of dirt from the hem of the priest's soutane with a handkerchief. (S, 23)

O'Flaherty brings Skerrett to the heights so that his fall is all the further. Devastating events that befall him, the death of his son, his wife's decline into alcoholism and then insanity, the drowning of the crew of his curragh, and his isolation from the community as Moclair incessantly attacks him, are starkly dramatic. Yet Skerrett, the bully and the wife-beater, attracts sympathy because he fights to survive, refusing ever again to bend the knee. O'Flaherty's narration of events has a grim fascination. Skerrett may rage, may try to fight back but he never stood a chance of surviving the relentless use and abuse of power by Moclair. Skerrett's tragedy is amplified by the futility of his posturing, yet he has a nobility even as he dies in the asylum: "I defy them all." (S, 223)

For a novel concerned with the slow sociological development of a community within which there is the steady psychological destruction of a character, events move deceptively quickly. O'Flaherty's screenwriter's awareness keeps the plot moving, and also provides many memorable visual events: the opening with the colourfully dressed peasants crouching in the boat's hold (S, 5-6); through the action scenes especially the introductory school beating and fight (S, 17-18) and the sinking of the curragh (S, 129-142); the poignant scene at the grave (S, 96); the menace as Skerrett hunts down Finnegan at his shebeen (S, 89-93); the climactic scene when all the island's different groups circle each other at the church gate meeting (S, 109-119);

and then the very humorous confirmation scene when Grealish steals the show (S, 170-171).

O'Flaherty's writing style varies to match his purposes. The sentences are complex when revealing Skerrett's thoughts, and lyrical when narrating or describing. The tone of vitality, but with danger lurking, is set in the opening paragraphs:

Then as the boat lay on the heaving water like a brown-winged fly, beneath the towering black mountain, along whose rain-bright upper slopes great shreds of cloud were driven by the wind, the sky grew suddenly clear and the sun came forth. Up rose the island to the view, ten miles to the south-west, a black speck upon the horizon, a dismal sea-lashed rock, lying across the harbour mouth from land to land except where two foaming channels east and west made roadways to the ocean. (S, 5)

The sentence structure changes with changing mood so that brisk, physical action is not only described, its spirit is felt. There is a breathless intensity when Skerrett, devastated by the death of his son, ferociously smashes at the rocks:

The moon came out. His body glowed in the moonlight. Sparks flew from the rock. His blows resounded far and wide throughout the silence of the night. (S, 54)

Brendan Kennelly thought that in *Skerrett* O'Flaherty was "at his gripping best."¹¹⁰

O'Flaherty himself had defined his own understanding of the novel requirements in a review in *The Irish Statesman*: "It must be a relentless picture of life, as lashing in its cruelty as the whip of Christ when there are moneychangers to be beaten from the

¹¹⁰ Brendan Kennelly, *The Irish Times* (03.09.1988), 7

Temple, as remorseless as the questions of a jealous lover. It must have the power to invoke great beauty or great horror in the same breath as it calls forth laughter from the lips.”¹¹¹ Certainly *Skerrett* has all these ingredients, but in this novel O’Flaherty uses them with objectivity and a calculated control, in contrast to the subjectivity of *The Black Soul*. The theme of selfish change being achieved by an abuse of power that callously destroys an individual is graphically represented in the story of Moclair’s isolation of Skerrett. The story is enacted through a chronological series of visual and dramatic events but the overarching plot ensures a coherence for these separate episodes. The characterisation is not limited to the central actors which ensures that a plausible local society is created within which the psychological drama is played out. O’Flaherty intended to write a novel that was what he considered distinctively Irish, not just in subject and setting, but also in tone and style. With *Skerrett* he created just such a novel. Sheeran, who judged O’Flaherty “not a novelist of the first rank” predicted “he will probably be seen as a key figure in the development of Anglo-Irish literature if and when the emphasis falls on the ‘Irish’ rather than the ‘Anglo’.”¹¹² In the event, the market moved away from the narrow national novel towards a wider international focus. O’Flaherty’s exaggerated melodrama and bursting energy did not appeal to his successors, though the early novels of John

¹¹¹ Liam O’Flaherty, quoted in Zneimer, *The Literary Vision*, 9.

¹¹² Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O’Flaherty*, 301.

Broderick and especially John McGahern present O'Flaherty's 'relentless picture of life', 'lashing in its cruelty' and 'remorseless'.

The internal qualities of these novels by Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Liam O'Flaherty mark them as well-conceived, well-constructed and exceptional. There were many other novelists writing between 1922 and the 1960s that would also qualify as technically-adept, imaginative and perceptive writers. Some of the novels of Molly Keane, Peadar O'Donnell, Francis MacManus, Francis Stuart, Kathleen Coyle, Mary Lavin, Maura Laverty, Norah Hoult, Sean O'Faoláin, Benedict Kiely, William Trevor and others, provide the evidence that, if not masterpieces, they are works of real literary quality. Many develop intriguing storylines that also explore universal themes with characters created purposefully and acting in ways that explore alternative attitudes, within settings though fictive that are relevant, and in styles, pace, tone and theme different with each novelist and each novel. The reader is drawn into these worlds, and affected by the experience.

Such works contradict the received 'myth of failure' that is attached to Irish novelists of the early independent decades. The 'myth of failure' concept itself is somewhat devalued by over-use. It has not been applied exclusively to Irish novels, for Malcolm Bradbury sums up critical views of the English novel, "The fact is the

novel has been dead in every decade of this century.”¹¹³ Similarly, Dominic Head inadvertently reveals that the critical views of the English novel closely parallel that of the Irish novel, though a decade later:

The English novel in particular, prior to the 1980s, has often been characterized as provincial, insular, and dominated by conventional forms of realism, and it is this perception of an essentially uninventive literary scene that, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to repeated assertions that the English novel was an exhausted form, in a state of terminal decline. In the standard encounters, English fiction is brought back from the brink by the ‘resurgence’ of the contemporary novel from the late 1970s onwards.¹¹⁴

In his review of the 300 realist novels from the political Left written in England during the 1930s, Andy Croft contests the ‘myth of failure’, pointing out that some “were no doubt ‘failures’. Some were exceptionally ‘dull’, one or two were considered to be ‘tasteless’ and some readers may have found some of these novels ‘bad’. But not all of them were all these, to every reader, every time they were read. A great many were spectacularly successful, measured in both critical and commercial terms.”¹¹⁵

In Ireland it was no different. No doubt many novels were ‘failures’ being ‘dull’ or ‘tasteless’ or plain ‘bad’. However, Maurice Walsh and Annie M.P. Smithson were spectacularly successful in commercial terms, and Cork-born writer

¹¹³Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, xii-xiii.

¹¹⁴ Dominic Head, *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 10.

¹¹⁵ Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 25.

Vivian Connell sold over three and a half million copies of *The Chinese Room*.¹¹⁶ But successful too within a narrower sales market for the more literary novel were Kate O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen and Liam O'Flaherty. Fifty years after criticism of the post-independence period, Declan Kiberd asks, "But wasn't it ever thus – the Irish language about to vaporise, the Irish novel about to die, the Irish theatre on the verge of extinction?"¹¹⁷ Perhaps it is not a matter of literary quality. Perhaps the novel between 1922 and the 1960s has simply had its time. As David Cunningham of Dublin's Cathach Books said in 2006, "the interest in indigenous writers such as Frank O'Connor, Sean O'Faolain and Liam O'Flaherty has bottomed out. We rarely get asked for them anymore. They've simply gone out of fashion."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Vivian Connell, *The Chinese Room* (1942) (London: Corgi, 1966). This rather bizarre murder mystery became notorious – and commercially a bestseller – because of its taboo-breaking diversions into irrelevant talk about sex. The huge sales it achieved were made possible by the size of the American market, its many editions, and as an easy read escape from the World War.

¹¹⁷ Declan Kiberd, 'After Ireland', *Irish Times* (29.09.2009).

¹¹⁸ David Cunningham, quoted in *Irish Times* (14.01.2006).

Chapter 5: The Short Story

Perfection is possible only in the short story, not in the novel. The short story is like a room to be furnished; the novel is like a warehouse.¹

I. B. Singer

Through much of the twentieth century in Ireland, the short story form was the most popular with readers, and the most widely practised by writers.² Some writers, from James Joyce and George Moore to Elizabeth Bowen and, later, John McGahern and William Trevor wrote both novels and short stories to critical acclaim. Notable collections of short stories were published by the poet John Montague and the playwrights Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel. Terence Brown, noting how so many Irish writers have been drawn to the short story and have excelled at the form, argues that, "Furthermore, Irish writers have written stories that are sufficiently distinctive in the context of writing in the English language to warrant the term 'the Irish short story'."³

David Marcus has observed that, "the Irish pre-eminence in the field of the short story has frequently been remarked upon by commentators both native and

¹ I. B. Singer, quoted in John Halperin *The Theory of the Novel. New Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 94, 91-108.

² Declan Kiberd, 'Story-Telling: The Gaelic Tradition', in Patrick Raftery and Terence Brown (eds.), *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross. Colin Smythe, 1979), 14.

³ Terence Brown, 'Sean O'Faolain and the Irish Short Story' in Arndt, Marie et al. (eds.), *Sean O'Faolain: A Centenary Celebration* (Turin: Tauben, 2001), 59.

foreign," leading him to query, "But what accounts for such pre-eminence? How is it that a country that boasts no notable tradition of novel-writing repeatedly throws up outstanding short story writers?"⁴ Without necessarily accepting his "no notable tradition of novel-writing", this chapter explores his questions about the Irish short story, then considers two case studies of acclaimed short story practitioners in Ireland. Seán O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor are chosen because they, along with Liam O'Flaherty, were the most renowned short story writers of their day, and both published extensively on the theory and practice of the genre. They also produced substantial bodies of work, received critical acclaim and wrote novels, enabling some consideration of the particular requirements of the two fictional forms.

The short story format is ancient. H. E. Bates makes the point that "the history of the short story, through its phases of myth and legend, fable and parable, anecdote and pictorial essay, sketch, and even down to what the crudest provincial reporter calls 'a good story' cannot be measured."⁵ Medieval tales such as Chaucer's may use different devices to more recent short fiction, but they are not substantively different. In the early nineteenth century, mainly thanks to the growing number of literary magazines, the short story form's popularity was well-established.⁶ The magazines' own format imposed the need for brevity, and, as Martin points out,

⁴ David Marcus, 'Introduction', *Irish Short Stories. Volume Two* (London: New English Library, 1982), 10.

⁵ H.E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (1941) (London: Robert Hale, 1988), 13.

⁶ David W. Martin, 'Chekhov and the Modern Short Story in English', *Neophilologus*, Vol. 71 (1987), 129.

“this practical necessity was to become an aesthetic virtue,” such that by mid-century “economy of design had come to be regarded as a prime quality of the short story.”⁷ Edgar Allan Poe used the concept of brevity, and allied it to a concept of maintaining a “singleness of effect”, which he considered poetry could best achieve.

Poe contended:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect.⁸

Poe continues, “In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design.”⁹ To frame this unity, Poe maintained that the short story should be read “at one sitting.”¹⁰ John Kenny points to the importance of Poe’s ideas in establishing the literary credentials for the modern short story: “In this alignment of the composition and effect of the ideal short story with lyric poetry, Poe was asking the short story generally to grow up as a genre fully conscious of its aesthetic possibilities”.¹¹ Indeed, while the obvious connection – both being prose fictions - between the novel and the short

⁷ Martin, ‘Chekhov’, 129.

⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Prose and Poetry* (New York: Modern Library Editions, 1951), 450.

⁹ Poe, *Selected Prose*, 450.

¹⁰ Poe, *Selected Prose*, 446.

¹¹ John Kenny, ‘Inside Out: A Working Theory of the Irish Short Story’, in Hilary Lennon (ed.), *Frank O’Connor: Critical Essays* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 104.

story is often assumed, it would appear that many modern short story writers consider that their form is actually closer to poetry.¹²

The short story as popularised by Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne in America, and Nikolai Gogol and Ivan Turgenev in Russia, generally reflected the notion that brevity and singleness of lyrical effect required a planned simplicity which avoided multiple sub-plots or digressions. Their subject matter and story construction, however, were very different. Poe often used mystery and the surprise ending. Turgenev, in contrast, in his *A Hunter's Sketches* (1852)¹³ developed a more naturalistic style. His stories are a linked collection narrated by an enlightened landlord observing, commenting upon and creating insights into the lives of the peasants. Unlike Poe, his stories did not rely on contrivances of adventure or plot, but were structured around ordinary daily lives. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the short story as a distinctive genre, with its own internal conventions and coherence. Most influential in this refinement of the form were Guy de Maupassant in France, and Anton Chekhov in Russia. Maupassant develops plot-based stories within a distinct short-story format, attempting "to make daily life more eventful by unscrupulous manipulation of surprises and coincidences."¹⁴ Chekhov's stories rely on atmosphere created from the interaction of

¹² Thomas H. Gullason, 'The Short Story: An Underrated Art', *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol.2, No. 1 (Fall 1963), 19.

¹³ Ivan Turgenev, *A Hunter's Sketches* (1852) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979).

¹⁴ Harry Levin, 'Editor's Preface', in *The Essential James Joyce* (London: Triad Grafton, 1977), 21.

character and circumstance rather than plot. Chekhov's main purpose was to reveal his characters' inner life, and so authorial choice rejected social background and incidental events. Martin argues that in Chekhov's art "poetic vision and strength of expression take precedence over outward movement."¹⁵ The development of the short story as a distinctive and popular genre was continued in the twentieth century by Irish writers, and by a wider international community of writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson in America, and Katherine Mansfield, A. E. Coppard, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, H. E. Bates and V. S. Pritchett in England. These writers continued to experiment with structural forms and innovative styles. Hunter summarises: "Instead of shrinking down novelistic tropes and conventions, they experimented with more artful methods of omission, compression, aperture and ellipsis. Out went traditional methods of plotting and characterization, and in came a new roster of narrative concepts: implication, ambiguity, suggestion, dilation and, above all, *plotlessness*".¹⁶

The Irish Short Story

The Irish short story tradition developed around these international influences. Most significant was the publication in 1903 of George Moore's *The Untilled Field*.¹⁷ In

¹⁵ Martin, 'Chekhov', 131.

¹⁶ Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁷ George Moore, *The Untilled Field* (1903) (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990).

this collection, Moore used Turgenev's style as a model to be applied to Irish peasant life. *The Untilled Field*, titled after Turgenev's *Virgin Soil* (1877), began an Irish tradition of stories that dealt with ordinary people in everyday life. The emphasis is on realism, with the psychological reactions of people to the life they encounter, in contrast to the plot-driven short story form, or the fantastical tales of the Gaelic oral tradition. Amongst the first to be influenced by the form employed by Moore was James Joyce, whose *Dubliners* was published in 1914.¹⁸ Characteristically, Joyce vehemently criticised Moore's work, writing in a letter to his brother Stanislaus in 1905: "I read that silly, wretched book of Moore's 'The Untilled Field' which the Americans found so remarkable for its 'craftsmanship'. O, dear me! It is very dull and flat, indeed: and ill written".¹⁹ Joyce applied his own insights and literary style to the ordinary people of early-century Dublin, just as Moore had done to the Irish rural poor. Levin delineates neatly the essence of Joyce's innovative style of short story telling, arguing that he – with Chekhov – were:

introducing a genre which has been so widely imitated that nowadays its originality is not readily detected. The open structure, which casually adapts itself to the flow of experience, and the close texture, which gives precise notation to sensitive observation, are characteristic of Joycean narrative. The fact that so little happens, apart from expected routines, connects form with theme: the paralysed uneventfulness to which the modern city reduces the lives of its citizens.²⁰

¹⁸ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914) (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1993).

¹⁹ Richard Ellmann (ed.) *Selected Joyce Letters* (New York: Viking Press, 1975) 78.

²⁰ Levin, 'Editor's Preface', 21.

Moore and Joyce, with their focus on ordinary life, and its rich potential for literary creativity, inspired the new generation of Irish writers. They also altered the form of the Irish short story from anecdote to impression. While the writers of the Irish literary revival were mainly Anglo-Irish Protestants from an upper-class background, by the early twentieth century Catholic middle-class writers who had different experiences and aspirations, began to be more prominent. The lead given by Joyce and Moore – though the latter was very much of the Big House class himself – was enthusiastically taken up by such writers as Seamus O'Kelly, Daniel Corkery, Liam O'Flaherty, Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin. Their subject was to be the lives of the ordinary Catholic working and middle-classes from which most came, their context was contemporary Ireland, and their medium was to be prose fiction.

Critics have offered many explanations for the success of the short story form in Ireland. James Kilroy points to one practical encouragement – access to publishing: “A stimulation for the energetic production of short stories has been the development of periodicals featuring them.”²¹ Kilroy then provides a comprehensive listing of the many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century periodicals that catered to, and helped create, a market within Ireland for the short story by Irish authors. He notes that there were various very popular magazines – such as the *Shamrock* and *Ireland's Own* packed with short fiction of various kinds. While the *Irish Monthly*

²¹ James Kilroy (ed.), *The Irish Short Story. A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 10.

published more literary stories, few were of outstanding quality. However, O'Faoláin and O'Donnell's *The Bell* (1940-1954), Seumas O'Sullivan's *Dublin Magazine* (1923-1958) and David Marcus' *Irish Writing* (1946-1957) were "landmarks in the history of the Irish short story."²²

The influence on the Irish short story of the oral story-telling tradition has been regularly asserted.²³ In the mainly rural Gaelic culture, the seanchaí would tell his local tales and folklore to people gathered around the cottage hearth. The oral tradition imposed its own restrictions on the seanchaí who was not just a storyteller, but was the custodian of tradition. He passed on traditional lore and learning by repeating verbatim the narrations he had been taught. He is conserving, not creating, and his performance is restricted by his own training and by the expectations of his audience. As Seamus Ó Duilearga, then Director of the Irish Folklore Commission, pointed out:

The Irish storyteller's audience were not children; they were grown-up people, and it was for them that the stories were told. Just as those of us fond of music never tire of certain tunes, so this folk-tale audience insisted on hearing again and again the old favourites. Both storyteller and audience were conservative and would permit of no change in the narrative. Tales must be passed on unaltered.²⁴

²² Kilroy, *The Irish Short Story*, 10-12.

²³ For example, Kiberd, 'Story-telling', 20; and Jaki McCarrick, 'What's the real story behind the success of the Irish short story?', *The Irish Times* (23.02.2016).

²⁴ Seamus Ó Duilearga, 'Irish Stories and Storytellers. Some Reflections and Memories', *Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 121 (March 1942), 44.

Even though the Gaelic language with its own rhythms and poetic expressive form changed into the more utilitarian English, and the fantastical and fast-moving tales became more psychological and plot-free, there possibly remained the author's need for this face-to-face relationship with his reader. Now the audience was written to rather than spoken to, but the 'one sitting' format remained. There is general agreement that there is a connection between the oral tradition and the written word, especially with Irish sagas and heroic tales.²⁵ The details of this connection are contested. Gerard Murphy argues that the "Irish narrative tradition has on the whole been essentially oral."²⁶ James Carney disagrees, arguing:

There can be no question of regarding these stories as semi-sacred compositions, transmitted for centuries in an almost unvarying form and finally 'written down' by an enthusiastic antiquarian with the scientific approach and attitude of a modern student of ethnography.²⁷

Ó Danachair confidently asserts that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "Irish oral tradition was deeply influenced by the written word."²⁸ It seems a moot point, however, as to the degree to which the reverse is true, that the Irish written short story was influenced by the Irish oral tradition.

²⁵ Caoimhin Ó Danachair, 'Oral Tradition and the Printed Word' in Maurice Harmon (ed.), *Image and Illusion. Anglo-Irish Literature and its Contexts* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1979), 33.

²⁶ Gerard Murphy, *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland* (Dublin: Cultural Relations Committee, 1961), 5-6.

²⁷ James Carney, *Studies in Irish literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), 277.

²⁸ Ó Danachair, 'Oral Tradition', 34.

William Trevor, asserting the dubious proposition that the Irish flair for storytelling “has long been recognised as a national characteristic,”²⁹ considers “it is against this background of a pervasive, deeply rooted oral tradition that the modern short story in Ireland must inevitably be considered.”³⁰ This seemingly common-sense “inevitability” is echoed by Rafroidi who comments, “the texture of the Irish story often if not always suggests the influence of fireside gatherings”, though he considers that this “does nevertheless require qualification.”³¹ Declan Kiberd also suggest a vague rather than any specific connection when he claims, “The vibrant tradition of story-telling was one major reason for the triumph of the short story as a characteristic Irish literary form.”³² With the disappearance of traditional storytelling, the connection between orality and written short fiction, remains in the radio story. Frank O’Connor, who became a popular radio reader of stories, explained how Russian writer Leskov “has tried to revive the art of the folk storyteller so that we can hear the tone of a man’s voice speaking.”³³ O’Connor was conscious of a key difference:

²⁹ William Trevor, ‘Introduction’, *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ix.

³⁰ Trevor, ‘Introduction’, xiv.

³¹ Patrick Rafroidi, ‘The Irish Short Story in English. The Birth of a New Tradition’, in Patrick Rafroidi and Terence Brown (eds.), *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), 27.

³² Kiberd, ‘Story-telling’, 23.

³³ Frank O’Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (New Jersey: Melville House, 2004), 28.

The folk storyteller, because his audience (like a child listening to a bedtime story) can only apprehend a few sentences at a time, unlike a reader who can hold a score of details before his mind simultaneously, has only one method of holding its attention, by piling incident on incident, surprise on surprise.³⁴

O'Connor's commitment to 'a man's voice speaking' marked the narrative of his short stories, as did his awareness of other storytelling techniques. Especially when broadcasting, his stories needed to be compact to deliver, "in a few sentences at a time", what could be understood and retained aurally. The requirement for immediacy, subtly different from a written text, and the restrictions of the oral form – the need for brevity while creating an easily-imagined location, credible characters, and an event with consequences that made a listener relish the experience – focussed his technique.

The popular ballad tradition may have some significance in the short story's success in Ireland. Both genres have parallels in content and form. Both are in the realist tradition, and usually concern a singular incident, concentrating on the event without dwelling on the details. Typically, rather than being part of a plot-sequence, the event is a focus that enables a dramatic presentation of a typical social situation or state of mind. Both ballad and short story make their impact through a lively presentation with rising dramatic tension, and through their brevity. The tradition of subversive ballads provided Irish short story writers with an audience attuned to social and political commentary. The tradition of reading aloud of newspaper

³⁴ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 28.

reports to gatherings in halls and at chapel gates would also have contributed to this interest in single incident oral accounts.

Later critics have emphasised the socio-political context. Just as the form was in transition from oral to written, a rural culture and way of life was becoming more urbanised, society was adapting to the end of Anglo-Irish landlordism with an emerging Catholic bourgeoisie, and the nation was enduring a painful change from colonised to independent. Kiberd, noting especially the oral/literary transition, argues: "By nature of its origins, the form was admirably suited to the task of reflecting the disturbances in Irish society as it painfully shed its ancient traditions".³⁵ Echoing Frank O'Connor's assertion that "without the concept of a normal society, the novel is impossible"³⁶, Kiberd continues:

But the short story is particularly appropriate to a society in which revolutionary upheavals have shattered the very idea of normality. In the years in which the modern Irish nation took shape, the short story was the form in which many writers chose to depict their vision of the emerging Ireland.³⁷

Kiberd had the advantage of hindsight, of knowing that the short story writing of the period was acclaimed, that pre- and post-independence Irish society was disturbed by the nature of the battle for independence, and that the creation of a new state was fraught as different ideologies struggled to assert supremacy.

³⁵ Kiberd, 'Story-telling', 15.

³⁶ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 17.

³⁷ Kiberd, 'Story-telling', 15.

However, claiming a causal connection between a politically-disturbed society and the success of the short story form seems too neat, and lacks evidence. During these same years, the short story form was successful in Britain and America, where there were not the same revolutionary events, nor was society as fragmented.³⁸ Despite this, Deborah Averill is convinced of the socio-political impact on fiction, stating: "The writers' increasing preference for the short story over the novel can be attributed to social factors." She considered the characteristics of the short story, "its emphasis on intuitive rather than rational or abstract truth, on brief flashes of revelation or insight rather than on sustained continuous development – give it a particular appeal for writers who lived in a disrupted, transitional society."³⁹ Kiberd and Averill are reinforcing the opinions of writers such as O'Faoláin and O'Connor that the Irish short story is indeed abetted by the nature of Ireland's – as they see it – broken and fragmentary society. They seem to be concentrating on the nature of the context rather than on the nature of the form.

H. E. Bates in *The Modern Short Story*⁴⁰ (1941), confirms his belief that the Irish short story is distinctive, devoting a full chapter to what he calls 'The Irish School'. He considers that "the Irish short story has been bred of vastly different qualities to

³⁸ Emma Liggins, Andrew Maunder and Ruth Robbins (eds), *The British Short Story* (London: Palgrave, 2011).

³⁹ Deborah M. Averill, *The Irish Short Story from George Moore to Frank O'Connor* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1982), 24.

⁴⁰ H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story* (1941) (London: Robert Hale, 1972).

the English," involving "a natural genius for dramatizing life, for expressing the commonest emotion by means of a kind of poetic declamation."⁴¹ However, he too points to the influence of Irish context on Irish form. In writers from Moore to O'Faoláin, he discerns:

an expression of the struggle between beauty and sin, between the legacy of moral superstition and the physical loveliness of life, a struggle that gives them all the attitude of men sensuously grasping and caressing at the flesh of life while fearfully glancing over their shoulders for the dark swirl of the benighting cassock.⁴²

Bates considered that O'Flaherty's short stories – he nominates especially 'Spring Sowing', 'The Tent' and 'The Mountain Tavern'⁴³ – were revolutionary and "could have done much to popularize the short story." However, he believed that his achievements "were not continued."⁴⁴ Similarly, he approved of O'Faoláin's 'Midsummer Night Madness'⁴⁵ and O'Connor's 'Guests of the Nation'.⁴⁶ Bates considered that these two writers: "both found their medium in the short story, where the bitterness of the revolution could be dramatized against a background of

⁴¹Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, 148.

⁴² Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, 150-151.

⁴³ Liam O'Flaherty, 'Spring Sowing' (1924), in Liam O'Flaherty, *The Short Stories of Liam O'Flaherty* (London: New English Library, 1986, 1-6. 'The Tent' (1926), in *The Short Stories of Liam O'Flaherty*, 104-111. 'The Mountain Tavern' (1929) in *The Short Stories of Liam O'Flaherty*, 222-229.

⁴⁴ Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, 159, 158.

⁴⁵ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Midsummer Night's Madness' (1932), in Seán O'Faoláin, *The Collected Stories of Seán O'Faoláin* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1983), 9-43.

⁴⁶ Frank O'Connor, 'Guests of the Nation' (1931), in Frank O'Connor, *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 3-12.

haunting natural beauty."⁴⁷ However he judged "that impetus given to the Irish short story by the Rebellion expended its momentum very quickly."⁴⁸

Elizabeth Bowen concludes her review of the literary qualities of the short fiction in her introduction to *The Faber Book of Short Stories* on an optimistic note, noting that the short story was healthy and its prospects were good. Her optimism was not burdened by history, for she considered that "the short story is a young art, as we now know it, it is the child of this century."⁴⁹ This child is creating its own styles and structures, without having to conform to the novel's conventions. Indeed, she considered the short story "in its use of action it is nearer to drama than the novel." While Bowen herself appreciated compression, tautness and clarity, she celebrated also its diversity - the potential to be fragmentary, allusive and inconclusive in contrast to the novel's "expansive tedium", the brevity of the short story enabled it to "more nearly than the novel approach aesthetic and moral truth."⁵⁰

Seán O'Faoláin

Seán O'Faoláin was a long-time admirer of Elizabeth Bowen's work, and for a brief period, her lover. He shared some of her critical views about the literary differences

⁴⁷ Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, 159-160.

⁴⁸ Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, 161.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories', (1950), in Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), 256.

⁵⁰ Bowen, 'The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories', 261.

between the novel and the short story, but he added a further dimension by emphasising the influence of the nature of Irish society on both genres. O'Faoláin was prominent in that generation of writers struggling with the inherent conflicts between what the Free State was becoming, and what it had had the potential to become. Conscious of the impact of the political and social context on artists, he explained his reason for writing about Ireland: "No writer worth his salt could live in such an atmosphere of self-delusion and self-esteem as this atmosphere of modern Ireland without desiring to correct the balance of truth in his art".⁵¹ O'Faoláin's fictions try to find 'the balance of truth' by exploring how the ideologies that held sway in independent Ireland were re-writing history by redefining the past. His writing career involved the envisioning of an Ireland independent of past nationalisms. His fictions, as well as his historical biographies, act as an important counter-intervention in the received narrative of nationalist history. O'Faoláin was determined to play his part in improving the country's intellectual climate. What marks his stories as different is the depth of analysis and psychological insights provided by his characters' actions and development. O'Faoláin brings us people, often well-off and well-educated, but from poor backgrounds – in itself a source of potential internal conflict – who are sensitive to the Irish community environment but whose lives are lived contrary to the rigid conventions of Irish society. He

⁵¹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'The Emancipation of Irish Writers', *The Yale Review*, Vol.XXXIII, No.3 (March 1934), 497.

explores the resolution of the conflict between their personal needs and freedoms, and the social conscience they have inherited from their parents and from society.

Born John Whelan in Cork, O'Faoláin was the son of a Royal Irish Constabulary policeman who was of that last generation of Irish Catholics who combined a love of Ireland with pride in the British Empire. The 1916 Rising, especially the executions of the leaders, stirred John's interest in nationalism. Though a member of the Irish Volunteers during the War of Independence, he was little involved, attending University in Cork. As the idealism of the war against the occupier shifted into the Civil War between former comrades, he became more disillusioned. On the side of the anti-Treaty forces, he was involved as a bomb-maker, and eventually as Director of Publicity for the Southern Division of the IRA. In his 1963 autobiography *Vive Moi!* he recalled of the War of Independence, "If ever a revolution was run on faith, hope and charity ours was. It was a heartening experience while it lasted. We saw men and women at their best, transformed beyond all mortal frailty."⁵²

The young Seán O'Faoláin who wrote about the wars he had experienced in his first collection, *Midsummer Madness and Other Stories* (1932), retained some of this optimism. The collection moves from the War of Independence with the excitements and terrors of irregulars facing an Imperial army, to the Civil War. Understandably

⁵² Seán O'Faoláin, *Vive Moi!* (1965) (London: Hart-Davis, 1965), 147.

the subject matter itself encouraged the author's move from romanticism to disillusion. The impact of the collection is intensified by its loose arrangement. The chaos and random violence of the time is reflected in the variety of situation, characters and themes, held together by evidence of individual humanity in the face of overwhelming inhumanity. The title story is narrated by John, a Republican officer sent from the city to investigate the inactivity of a local guerrilla group led by Stevey Long. The mood is created as John makes his way out of the city in intense dark and discomfort with every sound threatening, and the fear of the British around every corner. This atmosphere is essential, for what follows is not action, but an intellectual and social drama. The impact of the story is in its contradictions and juxtapositions. O'Faoláin points out that simple partisanship is never simple. This middle-class patriot is a cowardly bully – avoiding the enemy soldiers but bullying a girl he has made pregnant, abusing old Big House dweller Henn, and burning down an elderly neighbour's house as a substitute for real action. In contrast, the old Anglo-Irish prove to be tolerant and dignified.

In his early stories, O'Faolain wrote about the psychological pressures on sensitive young rebels fighting a guerrilla war while on the run through a threatening but beautiful landscape, trusting implicitly in strangers for shelter, even as they were in terror of capture and death, often whilst longing for a woman's love.

'Fugue'⁵³ (1928) concerns two young rebels – one the narrator – on the run from the murderous Black and Tans. The story charts their internal terror as they stumble from one sheltering cottage to another, at both of which the narrator meets a young woman to whom he is strongly attracted. Their journey, physically and psychologically, through a beautifully-evoked landscape which is at once protective shelter and dangerous threat, reflects the structure of the story. It alternates between security and hope, and fear and despair. At the height of hope, just as he kisses the girl, he is interrupted by the news of his companion's killing. He is forced to flee once more, despairing, "like a man who has been listening to music the livelong day, and after it his mind is full of strange chords, and ill-recollected- they torture him with a sense of something lost."⁵⁴ The story is well-titled 'Fugue', for the harshness of the narration is counter-pointed by the lyrical style of a musical tone-poem. The distinctly Yeatsian ending drifts off, remaining in the mind like the last notes of a musical piece: "The dawn moved along the rim of the mountains and as I went down the hill felt the new day come up around me and felt life begin once more its ancient, ceaseless gyre".⁵⁵

O'Faoláin's later fiction was to be less romantic than his *Midsummer Night Madness* collection. "'That's a lonely place!' said the priest suddenly. He was rubbing

⁵³ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fugue' (1928), in O'Faoláin, *The Collected Stories*, 49-64. Before collection in *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932) was first published in *Hound & Horn* in 1928.

⁵⁴ O'Faoláin, 'Fugue', 62.

⁵⁵ O'Faoláin, 'Fugue', 64.

the carriage-window with his little finger."⁵⁶ The opening of 'A Broken World'⁵⁷ (1937) is a classic example of scene and mood setting, for we soon realise that for this disillusioned priest the whole world is a lonely place. The story is allegorical. The priest tells the narrator how some years back he had taken practical steps to alleviate poverty in his parish, by organising some young men to take direct action to provide themselves with enough good land for a living. However they were too easily satisfied and failed to complete their revolution, and, like Ireland, settled for mediocrity. We slowly realise that the priest has become as broken as he perceives the world to be, principally because those who were being exploited were unaware and apathetic. Instead of being seen as the visionary benefactor, he, like Ireland's writers, has been treated as a trouble-maker, and is silenced by his superiors. Counterpointing the priest's positive ambitions is the negative figure of a farmer lethargic and so self-satisfied in his ignorance that the narrator wants to kick him. 'A Broken World' is exactly what O'Faoláin believes his Ireland to be.

O'Faoláin considered that the short story has no time for full characterisation, only a revealing of attitude or temperament through statement or deed. This he demonstrates in 'The Trout'⁵⁸ (1947), a slight but symbolic story about a young girl finding a fish trapped in a small pool in the depths of a frightening wood. Her final

⁵⁶ Seán O'Faoláin, 'A Broken World' (1937), in O'Faoláin, *The Collected Stories*, 163.

⁵⁷ Seán O'Faoláin, 'A Broken World' (1937), 163-166.

⁵⁸ Seán O'Faoláin, 'The Trout' (1947), in O'Faoláin, *The Collected Stories*, 383-386.

action in overcoming her terror by going alone to rescue the fish tells us all we need to know of her – she was a child, but by dint of her courageous facing of her terrors she has brought herself proudly into independence. Characterisation is slight. Rather the young girl seems part of the poetic imagery of the story – she skipping barefoot along the path in the shadows just as the fish’s silvery belly panted up and down. The symbolism works because it is mood and imagery that dominate, not superfluous characterisation.

Most O’Faoláin short stories centre neither on anecdote nor interest in any logical sequence of events, but on inner experience. His ‘Lovers of the Lake’⁵⁹ (1957) is a story almost devoid of incident but which maintains fascination as the reader observes the worldly pilgrims in the other-worldly Lough Derg. In essence the story of two adulterous lovers making a pilgrimage to Lough Derg on an impulse is about the contradictory forces that play upon Irish people. Its theme is that “inside ourselves we have no room without a secret door; no solid self that has not a ghost inside it trying to escape.”⁶⁰ The conflict between the abstraction of religious piety and the reality of an adulterous relationship becomes inverted as the reality of the hardship the religious practice imposes leads to an abstract reconsideration of their affair. The psychological journey with its twists and turns is paralleled by the interminable rounds of the devotions. The story illustrates deeply-ingrained

⁵⁹ Seán O’Faoláin, ‘Lovers of the Lake (1957), in O’Faoláin, *The Collected Stories*, 458-483.

⁶⁰ O’Faoláin, ‘Lovers of the Lake’, 476.

religious attitudes that lurk in the individual's sub-conscious, creating doubts and guilt even as individuals seem to flaunt society conventions. Their motivations – both conscious and sub-conscious – are subtly revealed, and the pilgrimage provokes the questioning of everything and the answering of nothing. Conflicting emotions abound – hope and despair, pride and humiliation, guilt and self-confidence. The story is technically extraordinarily skilful, and displays O'Faoláin's profound insights into individuals trying to create satisfying lives in a state of truce with conflicting taboos. The story concludes: "He looked down at her, and drew his arms about her. They kissed passionately. She knew what that kiss implied. Their mouths parted. Hand in hand they walked slowly back to the hotel, to their separate rooms".⁶¹ The paradoxes of the story have no easy resolution. It is for the reader to consider and make judgement on the universal questions the story raised.

Throughout his critical study of the genre, *The Short Story*⁶² (1948), O'Faoláin highlights the differences in technique and authorial vision between the novel and the short story, that make it difficult for an author to be equally adept at both. O'Faoláin had learnt this the hard way, having spent time writing novels as well as biographies, histories and literary criticism. His conclusion was that it was in the short story that he was 'at home'. His daughter, Julia, was to recall a letter that he wrote to her on seeing a list of his own output between 1947-1957: "I wrote, he notes,

⁶¹ O'Faoláin, 'Lovers of the Lake', 483.

⁶² Seán O'Faoláin, *The Short Story* (1948) (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1972).

two chatty books on Italy, a Newman family biography-chronicle, a book of criticism... and some 10 stories... when I should have been writing *nothing* but stories".⁶³ He became increasingly interested in the writings of the Russian realists, especially Turgenev, and saw their work as a possible model for a new school of Irish writing. By 1941 he was arguing, "The only real sanity in this island, as far as culture is concerned is in the novels of our realists."⁶⁴ However, he was disheartened by the difficulties of writing realist fiction in the Ireland of his day. A prolific writer, his motivation – the creation of an enlightened Ireland which would provide the context for an identifiable form of challenging and skilled writing – gives a cohesion to all his work. In his literary criticism, O'Faoláin was particularly interested in the novel and the short story, and their commonalities and differences. He fretted to find a rationale for his success in the short story and his self-proclaimed failure at the novel. In his insightful, but rather depressed, critical analysis 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', O'Faoláin claimed that the only life "knowable" to an Irish writer is either the intellectually simple life of the farm, "or the groping, ambiguous, rather artless urban life" of the new ex-rural Catholic middle-class. "In such an unshaped society", he bitterly concludes, "there are many subjects for little pieces, that is for the short

⁶³ Julia O'Faoláin, 'The Irishman Who Stayed', in Arndt, et al. (eds.), *Sean O'Faolain*, 24.

⁶⁴ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Editorial', *The Bell*, Vol.2, No.5 (Aug.1941), 12.

story writer: the novelist or the dramatist loses himself in the general amorphism, unthinkingness, brainlessness, egalitarianism and general unsophistication.”⁶⁵

In this critique of mid-century Ireland, he directly links context and form. He considers the dominant society is an amalgam of a repressive Church and the grubby greediness of the new elites. O’Faoláin is arguing that, as only the short story can narrate an unshaped or fragmented society, given that Ireland is such a society, only the short story can succeed in narrating Ireland. Historical evidence would challenge his depiction of Irish society, while literary criticism, including his own, would dispute the broken society/short story thesis. *The Short Story* delineates the skills and techniques that are essential to effective short stories, yet none of these are dependent on the context of a fragmented society for they have a universal applicability. O’Faoláin himself argues that French writers excel in the short story genre,⁶⁶ yet the French social context was very different to that in Ireland. O’Faoláin goes on to assert that the short story can only narrate fragmented societies:

I think it is even possible for the short story to be conditioned out of existence. The more firmly organized a country is the less room there is for the short story - for the intimate close-up, the odd slant or the unique comment. When society is established into a tradition the novel flourishes; it becomes a form of history; but the short story does not flourish.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Seán O’Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', *The Month*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1949), 375-376.

⁶⁶ Seán O’Faoláin, 'The Secret of the Short Story', *United Nations World* (March 1949), 37.

⁶⁷ O’Faoláin, 'The Secret of the Short Story', 38.

To make his theory fit the facts, since he admires American short story writers, America has to have "for a long time to come, the disparities, and varieties and incohesions of life," which "are reflected in the incoherence of the literature."⁶⁸ However, in *The Vanishing Hero*⁶⁹ (1956) he positively reviews the novels of William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, devoting a chapter to each author. In Ireland a fragmented society abets the short story, but renders the realist novel impossible. In America a fragmented society certainly abets the short story, but, simultaneously, fosters the novel as well.

Central to O'Faoláin's literary ideology is that the author matters: "It is not the subject that a man writes; it is himself. I cannot say it often enough." O'Faoláin was consistent in putting the artist above all. His inconsistency was whether society impinged or not. He occasionally argued that within the creative act, "all reference to society is entirely by the way, incidental and irrelevant":

The pure creative genius at work ignores morals, politics, time, the social order, place, even people. In that surge and flight of spirit the mind of the artist soars out of all the bonds that have commonly held it in - soars blindly from the wrist of the world in utter freedom.⁷⁰

If this is not mere rhetoric, O'Faoláin is investing the author with the power to overcome restraints. It is individual talent that dictates success or failure, not society.

⁶⁸ O'Faoláin, 'The Secret of the Short Story', 38.

⁶⁹ Seán O'Faoláin, *The Vanishing Hero* (1956) (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1956).

⁷⁰ Seán O'Faoláin, 'The Emancipation of Irish Writers', *The Yale Review*, Vol. xxiii, No. 3 (March 1934), 501.

There is the possibility that later rationalizing convinced O'Faoláin that Irish society was not irrelevant - it made the realist novel impossible. Whilst claiming that he had his doubts before leaving Harvard in 1929, he nevertheless did go on to write three realist novels in the following decade, presumably with hopes of their success. With the novel genre so all-embracing, were he convinced that the realist novel was doomed in Ireland he could have attempted variations of the traditional realist novel as other Irish contemporaries did, or, like Liam O'Flaherty – some of whose novels he did admire – adapt the realist genre to the particular conditions in Ireland.

O'Faoláin was conscious of "the difficulties of writing in a country where the policeman and the priest are in perpetual glow of satisfaction."⁷¹ The device he used to manage his material was the historical novel, *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1934),⁷² considered by Julian Moynahan to be "one of the few great novels of modern Irish literature."⁷³ Following his own rule – "Set any short story writer to work on a novel and he will inevitably break it up into episodes"⁷⁴ – he divided the narrative into three historical periods, commencing in 1854 and ending with the Rising of Easter 1916. Each period follows Leo Donnell's family as it moves from rural Limerick to urban Cork against a backdrop of nationalist politics. O'Faoláin claimed it was "a

⁷¹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Ireland after Yeats', *The Bell*, Vol. XVIII, No. 10 (March 1953).46.

⁷² Seán O'Faoláin, *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1934) (New York: Carol Publishing, 1990).

⁷³ Julian Moynahan, 'God Smiles, the Priest Beams, and the Novelist Groans', *Irish University Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1976), 26.

⁷⁴ O'Faoláin, *The Short Story*, 69.

long autobiographical book about how an Irish boy, brought up in the English mode, begins to find personal freedom through the fight for freedom of all his people.”⁷⁵ This is not how the novel presents. Leo Donnel has nothing of the 'English mode', and proves too inconsequential to bear the burden of finding either personal or national freedom. 'Autobiographical' suggests aspects of O'Faoláin's own life, but other than having a Cork policeman who took lodgers from the Opera House, this is not evident, nor would O'Faoláin's father have appreciated being the petty spy Constable Johnny Hussey.

The chronology provides the structure, and the focus on the family with its tensions and problems provides a closed world, whereas the novel goes on to deal with national issues. As a social novel the human interactions within the family with clashes of interests and personality are well created, but then not developed. Again there is great potential for considering the effect of cultural hybridity on Leo Donnel – his name changed to Foxe-Donnel by his Anglo-Irish aunts who sponsor him. The Foxe element of Leo's life quietly fades away. The problem is that the national story is artificially imposed on the family saga, and the requirements of both are incompatible. The first section is effective and has all the qualities to have made a satisfying stand-alone novel. It works because the focus is precise as Leo is converted from the urchin son of a middling – but financially encumbered – farmer into an unpleasant gentleman of the Big House. Dominating this first section is Judith, Leo's

⁷⁵ Seán O'Faoláin, 'What it feels like to be a Writer', in Carpenter, Andrew and Fallon, Peter (eds.) *The Writers: A Sense of Ireland*, (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1980), 152.

mother who, in the most memorable scene in the book, manages her husband's will-making from his deathbed to ensure Leo gets the best portion. Judith's characterization as cold and calculating and very real is effectively developed through incidents big and small that are then denied to other characters as the national story – the Fenian incident at Ballingarry – intrudes. The story has to cover over sixty years, so once Leo has been established there is no time for full development of character, or exploration of attitudes or behaviours. Consequently, though the book teems with relatives to reflect family sizes and inter-relationships, few are remembered.

The novel format allows for greater lyrical freedom, especially in envisioning the landscape as not only striking but as timeless and reassuring. Foxehall stood:

Hidden away from the tracks of peace and war alike, as a glance at the map will show, this region of the Deel is a meadowland of the finest heart caught in the loop of a river that leads to a harbourless sea – all of it so drenched in sleep that strangers to that plain fall into an apathy of mind and will until time accustoms them to its too soft air. History has reverberated only in the distance, and even then but rarely and too far away to be heard.⁷⁶

The narrative voice is that of the omniscient author, necessary given the historical spread, and the complexity. Few scenes are dramatically realised. The pace varies, sometimes creating an imbalance; some conversations are interminable, while fifteen years in jail, with its devastating impact on character, is dismissed in a few

⁷⁶ O'Faoláin, *A Nest of Simple Folk*, 4.

paragraphs. O'Faoláin the historian has achieved fidelity, while O'Faoláin the novelist required creativity.

The second novel, *Bird Alone* (1936),⁷⁷ repeated the historical approach to maintain structure, but the focus moves from a family within society to the inner development of one individual, Corney Crone. The novel is episodic but held together by following Corney as he confronts, and is confronted by, parochial and puritan attitudes. While social and cultural attitudes and issues are explored as they impact on Corney, much of the action is within his mind as he tries to find an accommodation with values he finds alien. O'Faoláin's final realistic novel was *Come Back to Erin* (1940).⁷⁸ Set in the 1930s, O'Faoláin uses his own experiences. The central figure is a Republican disillusioned with the complacent and deadening Ireland, who escapes to the intellectual stimulation of America. His return to Ireland with fresh insights and greater self-awareness only emphasises the meanness of the society that could have become so enriching. The central figure, Frankie Hannafey is portrayed as a tragicomedy figure. He appears absurd, playing the gunman years after the cause was abandoned. However, O'Faoláin may despise the unreconstructed revolutionary, but his contempt for the newly-constructed state is greater, saying that at least the revolutionary days had shared principles, whereas provincialism was simply individual and self-serving. John V. Kelleher considered

⁷⁷ Seán O'Faolain, *Bird Alone* (1936) (Dublin: Millington, 1973).

⁷⁸ Seán O'Faoláin, *Come Back to Erin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1940).

that, "as a novelist he was beaten not by a lack of talent - he has always had talent to spare and fling away - but by his too great demand upon a society intimate, homely, compact and too rigidly narrow."⁷⁹ By convincing himself of this limited construct of society, O'Faoláin self-destructed as a novelist.

In 1962 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing' saw O'Faoláin returning to his theme of "the comparative failure of the modern Irish Novel". "We have of course", he argued, "plenty of honourable efforts (perhaps, I might suggest, like my own efforts) but anything like top-notchers (Joyce's *Portrait* aside) how many others would the serious critic want to put aside...for this test?"⁸⁰ Frank Shovlin traces how time affected this positive judgement of his own work in his interesting comparison between the two editions of the autobiographical *Vive Moi!* He notes the change:

[1965]: This is why my first novel, *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1934,) gave me so much satisfaction. (p. 285)

[1993]: This is why my first novel, *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1934), which was not really a very good novel, gave me much satisfaction when I was writing it but less after it was done. (p. 291)⁸¹

Similarly, Shovlin points out how by 1993 O'Faoláin is prepared to write of *Come Back to Erin*:

⁷⁹ John V. Kelleher, 'Seán O'Faoláin: Books and Man', *The Atlantic* (May 1957), 68-69.

⁸⁰ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing', *Studies*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1962), 102.

⁸¹ Frank Shovlin, 'The Struggle for Form: Seán O'Faoláin's Autobiographies', *Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 35 (2005), 170.

‘As I pushed aside that unworthy-of-me third novel’, he wrote, ‘It was not that I wanted henceforth to write novels like Turgenev. I knew I could not, possessing neither his great talents as a novelists nor enjoying his fortunate circumstances’ (p. 298).⁸²

It would be unfortunate if a writer whose work contains much that is memorable and acclaimed to be of great quality finally dwelt on his perceived failures rather than revelling in his undoubted successes. His vision was the creation of a more liberal, cosmopolitan and inclusive Ireland. His journalism, histories and biographies argued the case, whilst his stories exemplified the possibilities for people liberated sexually and intellectually.

Frank O'Connor

Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin, friends and rivals, shared an upbringing in Cork, involvement in the revolutionary war and the Republican side in the Civil War. Both used these experiences as inspiration in the form of the short story to illustrate Ireland's traumas, and to indicate flashes of hope. Their stories shared Ireland and its people, but with a different focus. O'Faoláin's populations extended to the middle and upper classes, often with a more sophisticated attitude to travel and to religious and sexual behaviour. O'Connor remained a great chronicler of the ordinary, usually working class, Irish family. O'Faoláin used minimal characterisation because he was illustrating the imposition of principles and taboos

⁸² Shovlin, 'The Struggle for Form', 167-168.

on people. O'Connor's people are more rounded because he was interested in how individuals react to those principles and taboos. Ireland's politics and society in the first decades of the twentieth century indelibly marked a writer as sensitive as Frank O'Connor. Born Michael O'Donovan, he passed his formative childhood years in slum-living conditions in barracks-town Cork, and his impressionable adolescence amidst the horrors of the War of Independence and the Civil War. His early manhood was a time of expectation in the newly-independent State, while his mature adulthood was spent with the belief that the tyranny of foreign power had been replaced by native strictures.

O'Connor wrote persuasively about his childhood in the autobiographical *An Only Child*,⁸³ and there are clear parallels of his own experiences in the many childhood stories he produced. The personalities and incidents of *An Only Child* provide starting points for some of the brilliantly executed stories of youth. In the autobiography, Michael is ashamed of his paternal grandmother when he:

saw Grandmother at one of her modest repasts – a mess of hake and potatoes boiled in a big pot, with the unpeeled potatoes afterwards tossed on the table to be dipped in a mound of salt and eaten out of the fingers, and a jug of porter besides these – I fled for very shame.⁸⁴

The scene is re-created in 'First Confession' when grandmother comes to stay:

⁸³ Frank O'Connor, *An Only Child* (1958) (London: Pan Books, 1970).

⁸⁴ O'Connor, *An Only Child*, 23.

For dinner she had a jug of porter and a pot of potatoes with – sometimes – a bit of salt fish, and she poured out the potatoes on the table and ate them slowly, with great relish, using her fingers by way of a fork.⁸⁵

O'Connor, with his keen sense of drama, was not averse to making such full use of images that were highly visual while silently communicating character, history, tradition and impact. 'First Confession' is written in first person narrative because the subject is subjective – insight into one sensitive child's reaction to the mysterious experiences he is suddenly to be faced with in this adult world. The tone, exemplified by the priest, is wry and amused. The child's terrible 'sin' is laughable, but it is not the innocent child that is comically mocked, but the absurdities of the preparatory teacher, the rigmarole in the confessional box, and the vindictiveness of the sister.

O'Connor was very conscious of the debilitating impact guilt can have on otherwise healthy people. His stories expose an Ireland that retained restrictive social and religious orthodoxies which created a guilt-ridden population, bullied by politicians and priests. The innocent child is easily returned to health by simple kindness. The message is clear – empathy and understanding are needed, not coercion. Michael O'Donovan's own innocence was not to last long. He had limited formal schooling. A dreamer, he read boys' weeklies and novels about English public-schoolboys – a world at total odds to his own. He was fortunate to have been taught by the young Daniel Corkery. This inspiring teacher influenced Michael with

⁸⁵Frank O'Connor, 'First Confession', in Frank O'Connor, *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 175-176.

his learning, wide-ranging interests, especially for literature, the Irish language and nationalism. Corkery's idealistic view of nationalism may have encouraged Michael to join the rebel side in the civil war with the Free State troops. His friend, Sean Hendrick with whom he joined up and served, narrates: "On 28 June the Four Courts was attacked and the Civil War was on. Michael and I went to the local headquarters at Union Quay and volunteered our services. We were posted to publicity, and if it was not what we would have chosen it was probably the only place he would not have been in the way".⁸⁶ However, their role was not insignificant as they assisted a key republican leader, Erskine Childers, up to his capture and execution. They experienced being under fire, flight through hostile countryside, and capture and imprisonment. Imprisonment had a profound effect. For the writer it provided an education through the lectures and talks, the chance for study, the classes he attended and later that he taught. For the man, the harsh conditions and effects of imprisonment toughened his determination and provided insights that guided his life and his writings. His was a solitary voice opposing the boycott of a fellow prisoner, and one of few to oppose a hunger-strike, arguing for personal choice and life rather than gesture.⁸⁷ Abstractions were replaced by the actual, and consensus adherence to politics and religion by personal responsibility. Focus on the general moved to the individual.

⁸⁶ Sean Hendrick, 'Michael O'Donovan's Wild Son', in Maurice Sheehy, *Michael/Frank: Studies on Frank O'Connor*, (London: MacMillan, 1969), 8.

⁸⁷ O'Connor, *An Only Child*, 203, 209.

'Guests of the Nation', first published in collection in 1931, gave expression to O'Connor's concern about the impact of war on its participants.⁸⁸ Rebels – Donovan, Noble and the narrator, Bonaparte – are guarding two British soldiers, Hawkins and Belcher, being held hostage against the impending execution of rebel prisoners. Hostages and guards become friends, chatting and debating, whiling away the hours together in a warm secluded cottage. This atmosphere is shattered when the rebel prisoners are executed, and word comes to shoot Belcher and Hawkins in reprisal. The shock of the decision turns to horror as they are taken to a lonely bog-grave and shot. The tale is intrinsically powerful, but also has a universality – a consideration of how an abstraction, duty, can provoke physical inhumanity. Belcher speaks for normality, moments before his shooting:

"You understand that we are only doing our duty?" said Donovan.

Belcher's head was raised like a blind man's, so that you could only see his chin and the top of his nose in the lantern-light.

"I never could make out what duty was myself," he said. "I think you're all good lads, if that's what you mean. I'm not complaining."⁸⁹

O'Connor does not judge, neither indicting the executioners nor vindicating violence. He is concerned with the moment of impact of extraordinary events on ordinary people. O'Connor is sympathetic to people powerless to change the overwhelming forces that control their situation. They survive because they learn to cope, but they are changed utterly. For Noble, it was "as though there were nothing

⁸⁸ Frank O'Connor, 'Guests of the Nation', in O'Connor, *Collected Stories*, 3-12.

⁸⁹ O'Connor, 'Guests of the Nation', 11-12.

in the whole world but that little patch of bog with two Englishmen stiffening into it". For Bonaparte, "I was somehow very small and very lost and lonely like a child astray in the snow. And everything that happened to me afterwards, I never felt the same about again".⁹⁰

'Guests of the Nation' is justifiably acclaimed as a short story masterpiece, both for its overall conception and for its technical expertise. The first person narrative viewpoint centres the reader on the young rebel Bonaparte, thus involving the reader in Bonaparte's thoughts and actions. The depiction of life in the cottage – the relaxed card-playing, the bantering conversations, the overwhelming bonhomie – creates false security that makes the dramatic climax so much more horrific and devastating. The story is technically adept. The organic structure balances and contrasts: Hawkins is talkative while Belcher is a thinker, Donovan is hardened and repressed, while Noble and Bonaparte are kindly and open. The elements of character, language and plot are precisely engineered to generate dramatic tension building to the terrible killings. The comfortable happiness of the opening moves through the tension of uncertainty before the horror of the decision, to the climax of desolation at the act. The events are condensed, so afterwards every insignificant detail suddenly has a heightened significance that the reader missed, for example, the argument about religion and an after-life has a dramatic significance only when the abstractions of Hawkins' arguments becomes the reality of his execution. Every

⁹⁰ O'Connor, 'Guests of the Nation', 12.

detail of character, of setting, and of tone has been subtly building towards the shocking dramatic conclusion. The story is memorably effective as an illustration of a universal dilemma. By stripping away the trappings of war, patriotism and nationalism, the abstraction of war is laid bare in the reality of a real situation for real people. The story ends, but is not over. For the reader, as for Bonaparte the story will never go away. Certainly, for O'Connor, the insights of that story endured. His experiences of these wars cost him his innocence, but not his idealism. He realised the potency of the short story in challenging the unpalatable status quo. He proceeded to hone his own skills, for he claimed that the "storyteller is not a soldier in the field, but a guerrilla fighter, fighting the obscure duels of a great campaign".⁹¹

O'Connor's critical theory of the short story is provided in his writings and in his teaching. In 1963, he published *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* based on his Stanford University lectures. The central argument is that the short story is a distinct art form. He argues that whilst the novel and the short story derive from the same source, there are crucial differences. Unlike the short story, the novel needs a 'normal' society and a central hero with whom the reader can identify. The novel is marked by chronological time necessary to develop both character and plot, while the short story focuses only on the critical moment and its impact on the individual. He illustrates this essential quality by quoting from Gogol's 'The Overcoat' in which

⁹¹ Frank O'Connor, 'And it's a Lonely, Personal Art', *New York Times Book Review* (April 12th, 1953), 34.

the sad figure of Akakey Akakeivitch, hounded by his fellow clerks, suddenly shouts:

“Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?” and there was something strange in the words and in the voice in which they were uttered. There was a note in it of something that aroused compassion, so that one young man, new to the office, who, following the example of the rest, had allowed himself to mock at him, suddenly stopped as though cut to the heart, and from that day forth, everything was as it were changed and appeared in a different light to him.⁹²

The core of the short story for O'Connor is, like James Joyce before him, this epiphanic moment, the impact of an incident that provokes a life-changing insight. This insight, however, is not necessarily one concerning universal truth, but one that matters to an individual. Nadine Gordimer suggests that in the short story "a discrete moment of truth is aimed at – not *the* moment of truth."⁹³ O'Connor insists that the short story has never had a hero, it has instead “a submerged population group”. He argues:

Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society...As a result there is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not find in the novel – an intense awareness of human loneliness. (*LV*, 19)

This submerged population needs an authentic voice. O'Connor fears that “Generations of skilful stylists from Chekov to Katherine Mansfield have so fashioned the short story that it no longer rang with the tone of a man's voice

⁹² Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice. A Study of the Short Story* (1963) (Hoboken, N.J.: Melville House, 2004), 15. Subsequently references given in the text as (*LV*, page number).

⁹³ Nadine Gordimer, 'The Flash of Fireflies', in Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), 265.

speaking." So Leskov is praised because "He has tried to revive the art of the folk storyteller so that we can hear the tone of a man's voice speaking" (*LV*, 28). O'Connor recognized that whilst oral storytelling was a public art, the modern short story was a private art so the short storywriter must speak directly to a solitary reader. By re-introducing the storyteller's voice, O'Connor sought the imaginative participation of the reader. The theory he expressed was, of course, self-serving. His backward look towards the end of his career, analysed his own techniques and raised them to the level of general rules. Concentration on submerged groups does not obscure the individual's centrality in O'Connor stories. The individual is not allowed to be a victim of circumstance for he is responsible for his own actions. The focus is on individual action, with its consequences. The story becomes the unique response of each individual to the challenges the world inflicts, and the inherent conflict between individual integrity and external challenge provides the dramatic tension.

O'Connor clarifies submerged population groups, "whatever these may be at any given time – tramps, lonely idealists, dreamers and spoiled priests" (*LV*, 20). He could have added other groups marked by their difference from the majority amongst whom they live; illegitimate children, exiles, revolutionaries, the urban poor and the peasantry. Certainly, such submerged population groups do people his stories. He also argued that "the short story remains by its very nature remote

from the community – romantic, individualistic, intransigent” (LV, 20). Yet, as Thomas Flanagan has pointed out:

One pauses over this only for the curious reason that it is his own short fiction which comes first to mind as evidence to the contrary. It speaks from within and with the accents of its community, and, to repeat, it knows to a syllable how everything in that community can be said.⁹⁴

It is the community and its voices that dominate his acclaimed 'In the Train'.⁹⁵

O'Connor considered that “the storyteller differs from the novelist in this: he must be much more of a writer, much more of an artist” indeed “more of a dramatist.” (LV, 22) This story was so imaginatively dramatized that it was later adapted as a radio play, a stage play and a film. O'Connor's librarian friend, Dermot Foley, records how he took an overwrought O'Connor to the Central Criminal Court simply to get him out of himself. There:

The galleries were jammed with onlookers, but no one appeared to have any interest in the little woman with the shawl in the dock, charged with poisoning her husband....within a week I was sitting with him again, listening to the that wonderful story, 'In the Train', which he had wrought from that court scene.⁹⁶

O'Connor's theatre director's imagination served him well.

'In the Train' is unusual in lacking a narrative voice, and being held together by symbolic, structural devices. The key was to avoid the cliché of the court drama,

⁹⁴ Thomas Flanagan, 'The Irish Writer', in Sheehy, *Michael/Frank*, 162-163.

⁹⁵ Frank O'Connor, 'In the Train' (1935), in Frank O'Connor, *My Oedipus Complex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 125-139.

⁹⁶ Dermot Foley, 'The Young Librarian', in Sheehy, *Michael/Frank*, 61.

while the setting of a train with discrete compartments provided locations for comparisons and contrasts. The opening is a dialogue that draws the reader immediately into the action:

“There!” said the sergeant’s wife. “You would hurry me.”

“I always like being in time for a train,” replied the sergeant, with the equitability of one who has many times before explained the guiding principles of his existence.⁹⁷

The conversation and style of the opening are mundane, creating a tone that disguises the extraordinary circumstances. Vital information is withheld, so what seems like the story’s beginning is, in fact, the beginning of the end. Each compartment is used to exemplify the strict hierarchy; the sergeant and his wife, the constables, the peasants, and finally Helena, the accused. She is first met being put into the sergeant’s compartment, but “when she laid eyes on the sergeant’s startled face she stepped back, tore herself free, and ran crazily up the platform.”⁹⁸ Thus the reader begins to realise all is not as it seems. Cleverly, the conversation in each compartment is on similar subjects, but the speaking voices vary with the occupants. The action is linked by the policemen and especially the drunk going from compartment to compartment. The conversation begins to reveal the irony that when the sergeant’s wife asked the peasants “How do you do? Had a nice time?” what they had actually been doing was perjuring themselves at Helena’s murder trial. The relentless rhythm of the train speeds them to their destination and their destiny:

⁹⁷ O’Connor, ‘In the Train’, 125.

⁹⁸ O’Connor, ‘In the Train’, 127.

And while they talked the train dragged across a dark plain, the heart of Ireland in the moonless night tiny cottage-windows blew past like sparks from a fire, and a pale simulacrum of the lighted carriages leaped and frolicked over hedges and fields.⁹⁹

The mood changes as they near Farranchreesht, and the peasants talk of the punishment that the community will inflict. The final section is narrated by Helena, who symbolically receives her final and only kindness, when the drunk says “I look into your eyes and I see the beauty of your nature”.¹⁰⁰ This irony – she is a poisoner – is matched with the polite farewells to her by the policemen, marking the end of one life and the threat of the isolation to come.

The description of this submerged population group of peasants emphasizes the un-reconstructed traditional way of life that was being assimilated into the newly independent Ireland. Even in the cities of modern Ireland they will create the wildness of the traditional West:

Into the pale lamplight stepped a group of peasants. Not such as one sees near a capital but in the mountains and along the coasts. Gnarled, wild, with turbulent faces, their ill-cut clothes full of character, the women in pale brown shawls, the men wearing black sombreros and carrying big sticks, they swept in ill at ease and shouting defiantly. And so much part of their natural environment were they that for a moment they seemed to create about themselves rocks and bushes, tarns, turf-ricks, and sea.¹⁰¹

O'Connor has provided a graphic illustration of the conflict facing post-colonial Ireland. The formal justice system remained associated with the coloniser and could

⁹⁹ O'Connor, 'In the Train', 128.

¹⁰⁰ O'Connor, 'In the Train', 135.

¹⁰¹ O'Connor, 'In the Train', 126-127.

be undermined by perjury, whereas the tightly-knit communities could impose their own punishment without trial. For dramatic effect the story finishes suspended. The reader suspects from the conversations what is likely to happen, but cannot be sure. Even Helena, her husband dead by her hand, and her lover dead to her by her choice, cannot be sure, but desperate loneliness is her expectation. The major recurrent theme in O'Connor's stories is this predicament of human loneliness constantly lurking there in the feelings, reactions and actions of his characters.

James Matthews describes O'Connor's interest in, "the strange, intuitive ways people find to ease their loneliness."¹⁰² Easing the loneliness of place and circumstance is recounted in 'The Bridal Night'.¹⁰³ The story opens with a first-person narrator meeting and chatting to an old lady on a desolate strand:

"'Tis a lonesome place," said I.

"'Tis so" she agreed," a lonesome place, but any place is lonesome without one you'd care for."¹⁰⁴

The old lady tells how her son, Denis, is in the asylum. He had become obsessed about a local schoolteacher, Winnie, and had been driven insane by his unrequited love. Finally, the night before his removal to the asylum, he has to be tied down to prevent him injuring himself. Denis promises to keep himself calm if the schoolteacher would come to see him. This she does, and shows her courage and

¹⁰²James Matthews, *Voices: A Life of Frank O'Connor* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 104.

¹⁰³ Frank O'Connor, 'The Bridal Night', in O'Connor, *Selected Stories*, 19-25.

¹⁰⁴ O'Connor, 'The Bridal Night', 19.

compassion by agreeing to slip into his bed as he dreams they are a couple. Thanks to her, he has an innocent and peaceful night in her arms, and can go off unrestrained and with dignity to the asylum. The story is poignant and affecting, but never declines into sentimentality because O'Connor retains control through the objective voices. Winnie remains a memorable example of human response to a human crisis. She overrides restrictive social convention; she risks community punishment to do what is right. Denis has a moment of peace in his troubled life, and his mother, though she will remain lonesome, won't be desolate because Winnie's kindness makes her declare, "for the time being I felt 'twas worth it all, all the troubles of his birth and rearing and all the lonesome years ahead."¹⁰⁵ Their loneliness has been eased.

Several stories were to consider the application of an abstract idea in an actual setting. O'Connor was acutely aware of tribal taboos and restrictions, and the never-questioned conventions of Irish life which resulted in much family conflict and public censure. In 'Peasants', for example, he examines and contrasts how 'justice' is conceived by conventional society and by a submerged group.¹⁰⁶ Michael Cronin steals from the parish club. Parish Priest, Father Crowley, insists on prosecution, despite a community delegation requesting Cronin be treated traditionally and sent away to America to avoid scandal for his family and the parish. Cronin is

¹⁰⁵O'Connor, 'The Bridal Night', 25.

¹⁰⁶ Frank O'Connor, 'Peasants', in O'Connor, *Selected Stories*, 313-320.

subsequently jailed; but the twist becomes that he afterwards marries money and as a moneylender becomes the scourge of the community, and Father Crowley is ostracised and it is he who is sent into exile.

O'Connor is presenting dilemmas. There is mutual incomprehension between the strict legal and moral principles of the priest, and the principles of traditional community law and action – "Put the police on the boy and he in trouble?"¹⁰⁷ The priest's lack of compassion and blind faith in abstract justice conflicts with the community's blindness to the moral viewpoint. In their real world, money, not principles, will make their problem go away. In the end both priest and community pay the price of intransigence, and the thief wins out. The narrative technique is central to the effectiveness of the story. The third person narrator, through his use of idiom and intimate knowledge of traditions and attitude, is clearly a member of the community. His voice is the speaking voice of the community, yet is sufficiently detached to narrate with casual humour, while recognizing the self-destruction of the community and the pain of the priest. The narrator's voice is clearly not the author's voice, for the implication is that they are saying quite different things.

'Bridal Night' used a quintessentially Irish setting to comment on Irish attitudes. However, the themes of utter loneliness alleviated by human empathy and kindness, and self-destruction brought on by self-delusion are universal. Describing himself as a writer in New York's *Herald-Tribune*, O'Connor explains:

¹⁰⁷ O'Connor, 'Peasants', 314.

I prefer to write about Ireland and Irish people merely because I know to a syllable how everything in Ireland can be said; but that doesn't mean that the stories themselves were inspired by events in Ireland.... Only language and circumstance are local and national; all the rest is, or should be, part of the human condition.¹⁰⁸

In a light-hearted letter (1958) to his editor at *The New Yorker*, William Maxwell, O'Connor wrote: "Of course, it's not a novel! Novels were written exclusively by Jane Austen and Turgenev, and the secret died with them, but the substitutes have a lot to be said for them".¹⁰⁹ His gentle cynicism may have been influenced by the critical reaction to his own novels, *The Saint and Mary Kate* (1932)¹¹⁰ and *Dutch Interior* (1940).¹¹¹ Whilst retaining some lingering regard as suggested by "substitutes have a lot to be said for them", O'Connor himself was to speak disparagingly of the novels, though on publication both were positively received. *The Saint and Mary Kate* does seem dated to a modern reader. The characterisation is vivid especially for the minor characters, creating a realistic if picturesque depiction of regional Irish life especially for the poor. Interestingly for his later depiction of submerged population groups, it is possibly his tramps and travellers who remain memorable with their language and curses, though he avoids playing to an audience, avoiding stage-Irish caricatures. The novel's weakness is that the ending

¹⁰⁸ Frank O'Connor, quoted in Steinman, Michael (ed.) *The Happiness of Getting It Down Right. Letters of Frank O'Connor and William Maxwell*. (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 15.

¹⁰⁹ Frank O'Connor, 'Letter. Late October 1958', in *The Happiness of Getting It Down Right*, 95.

¹¹⁰ Frank O'Connor, *The Saint and Mary Kate* (1932) (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990).

¹¹¹ Frank O'Connor, *Dutch Interior* (1940) (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990).

rather peters out. While understanding that in the context of this Ireland, O'Connor does not want to end on an-overly optimistic, or overly-pessimistic note, what remains is not ambiguity but dissatisfaction. O'Connor in *The Lonely Voice* argued that a novel required a fully characterised and believable central hero. With hindsight perhaps he too considered that the characterisations of Phil and Mary Kate are inadequate to carry the novel.

Dutch Interior, as the title implies it should, creates an impression of the dullness of contemporary Irish life. Declan Kiberd has identified a dynamic relationship between Irish modernist novels and the Irish short story, arguing that "the fixation on the short story may be discerned not far below the surface of such modernist masterpieces as *Ulysses*, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and Beckett's trilogy as well."

He continues:

Each of these is a thinly-disguised collection of short stories fretted into a form suggestive of the experimental novel. Nor should this seem surprising, given that the short story is the form which renders the lives of the marginal and the isolated, whereas the traditional novel tends to feature the urbane and complex relationships of a fully "made", calibrated society.¹¹²

Dutch Interior does seem to be of similar form. Written about Cork, but with universal concerns, it provides a collection of illuminating scenes in order to provide a composite picture. While this may have been part of an intention to catch the fragmentary nature of society, it diminishes the book as a novel by being over-

¹¹² Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*. (London: Vintage, 1996), 494.

episodic. The novel format does give opportunity for longer lyrical passages that are affecting and effective, and for mood changes from hope to despair, from kindness to cruelty, that portray the human condition. The danger for the episodic novel could be that the demands of brevity within a scene mean that characters appear as caricatures, while in the short story characterisation is accepted as unnecessary. While O'Connor's insights and writing skills are apparent, the format requires a more integrated structure.

In 1963, O'Connor excused his novels in an interview. Asked if he had written any novels, he replied:

Two novels - both of them awful. It's not my *métier*. You see I would call myself a spoiled poet. I write my stories as I've suggested, as a lyric poet would write his poems - I have to grasp all my ideas in one big movement, am a violent, emotional man, and novels require meditation and a more plodding day-to-day kind of energy.¹¹³

This does rather sound like an unapologetic apology, less an explanation of failure than an assertion of himself as dynamic man-of-action, who cannot plod like a novelist. The impulses that made O'Connor dissatisfied with his novels also made him an effective critic of genres, which in turn kept him restless about his own stories. His tongue was only partly in his cheek when he told potential short story writers: "I would wish you to believe that if you work hard at a story over a period of twenty-five or thirty years, there is a reasonable chance you may get it right."¹¹⁴ As

¹¹³ Frank O'Connor, quoted in Michael Longley, 'Frank O'Connor: An Interview', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn 1990), 273.

¹¹⁴ Frank O'Connor, 'Writing a Story – One Man's Way', *The Listener* (23 June 1959), 140.

he developed as a writer he found some of his earlier work naive, and changed the style, moving away from earlier romantic language to a more realistic style.

Frank O'Connor illustrated individual resolutions of the universal problem of maintaining personal integrity within the intimacy of family life. O'Connor writes with moral indignation mollified by empathy with his characters. Conflict between the individual's human and personal drives and the conventions and traditions of society is common to different cultures across the centuries. In post-independence Ireland, the conservatism of society ensured that that personal conflicts would be widespread. Ireland was well-served by such writers as O'Faoláin and O'Connor who entertained as they said the unsayable and the unsaid – and in so doing they helped to create a more modern and humane society.

The Irish theorists of the short story genre Elizabeth Bowen, Seán O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor were adamant that the novel and the short story genres were quite discrete and had their own internal demands. While they focus on the essential differences between the forms, Q. D. Leavis, draws attention to the impact that the different demands had on the writer. Noting that the major market for short fiction in the early twentieth century was the monthly magazine, she concludes:

Since the magazine's function now is to provide reading fodder for odd moments, travelling and after-business hours, glanced through with a

background of household chatter or 'the wireless', it is essential too that the stories they provide should be short, 'snappy,' as crudely arresting as a poster and for the same reason, and easy enough for the jaded mind to take in without exertion. What it really means is that the young writer who is potentially a serious novelist and is obliged to earn part or all of his living by his pen is in a far worse position than Trollope, Dickens, Thackeray: if he submits and trains himself to produce acceptable short stories and serials, then he is spoilt for literature.¹¹⁵

Leavis discerned that the formulaic style demanded by the medium compromised skills, and dulled sensitivities. She also considered that it was the potential novelist who would be spoiled, having reduced himself to produce the short story. Some critics do write as though they consider the short form the inferior form to be written only when the novel has failed. Thomas Gullason outlines the argument he goes on to reject:

Frank O'Connor moved to the novel twice in *The Saint and Mary Kate* and *Dutch Interior*, and failed. On the one hand, then, as short story writers try other art forms they are supposedly escaping; on the other, when they fail in the novel form and move back to the short story, they move to something less demanding and really inferior.¹¹⁶

It was not so simple. One of the period's great novelists, William Faulkner, makes it clear:

Maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't, and then tries the short story, which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), 28.

¹¹⁶ Gullason, 'The Short Story', 22.

¹¹⁷ Anthony Whittier, 'Frank O'Connor', *The Paris Review*, The Art of Fiction Interviews, XXIX (1958), 45.

The economic reality in the 1950s and 1960s was that short story collections rarely reached the break-even point for the publishers, though a novel stood a good chance of doing so.¹¹⁸ With collections unpopular with publishers, the writer, to survive, was obliged to write for the magazine market. That economic necessity may be as potent as any literary motivation is confirmed by Nadine Gordimer, who points out that, in England, "no story-writer could write only what he pleased and continue to eat."¹¹⁹ The popularity of short stories for the magazines provided the necessary income.

Between the foundation of the Irish Free State and the early 1960s, O'Connor and O'Faoláin had their equals as acclaimed Irish short story writers. Liam O'Flaherty, Elizabeth Bowen and Mary Lavin, all with their unique style and sensitivities, created short story collections that drew international praise. Many others, including Daniel Corkery, Norah Hoult, Walter Macken, Dorothy Macardle, Michael MacLaverty, Bryan MacMahon, Brinsley MacNamara and James Plunkett were successful in Ireland, if less well-known abroad. There is no reason to compare, evaluate and grade the forms or the authors. The novel and the short story are separate genres with separate features and requirements. It is a matter of the artist's individual talents. Elizabeth Bowen, Liam O'Flaherty, William Trevor and John McGahern were able to adapt their talents to succeed in both genres. Seán O'Faoláin,

¹¹⁸ Gullason, 'The Short Story', 18.

¹¹⁹ Gordimer, 'The Flash of Fireflies', 266.

Frank O'Connor and Mary Lavin had talents that fitted the short story. They are not failed novelists, they are brilliant short story writers.

It is evident from the volume and qualities of the short stories written in this period that the genre did thrive in the Ireland of the day. Various explanations have been offered for this success, including the Irish oral storytelling tradition and the excitements and small dramas as the newly-independent state emerged from armed struggles. There were practical reasons. There was a ready audience won for the short story by the skilled practitioners of the nineteenth century and the pre-independence decades, who had helped create an expectation of success. There was also a large market within Ireland of magazines and newspapers anxious to satisfy their readers' demands for stories, and, for the better-known writers, an extended market in the Irish diaspora. What is questionable is both "the Irish pre-eminence in the field of the short story",¹²⁰ and, indeed, whether there is a distinctive Irish short story at all.¹²¹ It is unnecessary, if not impossible, to assess 'pre-eminence' in the short story genre across the world. Practitioners of the short story in England, France, United States of America and Russia are all extolled in various critical assessments, including those of both Séan O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor.¹²² It is sufficient to acknowledge that Irish short story writers were eminently successful.

¹²⁰ Marcus, 'Introduction', 10.

¹²¹ Brown, 'Séan O'Faoláin', 59.

¹²² For example, O'Faoláin, *The Short Story*, and O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*.

It is dubious whether there are qualities inherent in the short stories by Irish writers or set in Ireland using recognisably Irish themes, that mark them as distinctively Irish. It is debateable whether such stories are distinctively-different from those of other cultures and locations. Many short stories examine universal issues and insights, and use styles and techniques that are common to the genre anywhere. Yet the concept of the distinctively-Irish story remains current. Claire Keegan in 2014 considered the Irish to be "a covert people" whose hidden stories come out in short fiction through the "talker", who is often treated like "the fool."¹²³ Kevin Barry, with ironic humour, finds the reasons: "That's it – 300 days of rain a year are ideal conditions to make us fabulous storytellers. That, and perhaps we love the sound of our own voices."¹²⁴ However, across all cultures the society, the communities, the families and the individuals all have their secret lives, inadvertently revealed. People loving the sound of their own voices is hardly unique to Ireland, nor is its rain. What does seem apparent from the abundant evidence of the quantity and quality of short story writers between 1922-1960s is that Ireland and its society probably did encourage the short story. Irish traditions and conditions certainly did not hinder the genre.

¹²³ Claire Keegan, quoted in Jaki McCarrick, 'What's the real story behind the success of the Irish short story?', *Irish Times* (23.02.2014).

¹²⁴ Kevin Barry, 'Raise your glasses:...To the winner of *The Sunday Times* short-story award.', *Sunday Times* (01.02.2012).

Conclusion

“Gabhlanach an rud an scealuidheacht.”

“Storytelling is a complicated affair”¹

St. Patrick

Henry James started it. He claimed, "the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep."² Seán O'Faoláin applied the argument – that the novel needs a functioning society to flourish – to Ireland.³ He then added the rider that while Irish society was troublesome for the novel, it actually enhanced the short story.⁴ O'Faoláin did not present any objective explanation, rather just his intuition, for, as he explained tongue-in-cheek, as usual, "In Ireland I had been under the impression that it is boring to make any statement that one can prove."⁵ His writings and those of Frank O'Connor raised a debatable theory to the level of acceptance as uncontested fact. Fellow writers repeated the mantra adding to its popular respectability. Colm Tóibín, for example, argued, "We require an accepted world for the novel to

¹ St. Patrick, *Acallamh na Seanorach*, quoted in Benedict Kiely, *Modern Irish Fiction. A Critical History* (Dublin: Golden Eagle, 1950), 68.

² Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: MacMillan, 1879), 3.

³ Seán O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', *The Month*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1949), 102, 103.

⁴ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing', *Studies*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1962), 102.

⁵ Seán O'Faoláin, 'A Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man', *Irish University Review* Vol. 6, No. 1 (1976), 16.

flourish."⁶ Thomas Kilroy notes of O'Faoláin's theories: "His whole explanation of why the novel was doomed in this period is the statement of someone who has wrestled with the demon without success. Yet his main assumption is indisputable."⁷ Later critics have reinforced the academic acceptability. Deborah Averill argued that Irish writers: "could not achieve the stable universalised view of Irish life that the novel demands."⁸ Vivian Mercier considered that Irish writers "do have a special gift for the short story",⁹ but are "weak in the novel."¹⁰

A decade ago, Paddy Bullard made a case for review of the assumptions made by O'Faoláin, O'Connor and others, as he offered a concise summary: "Their argument is that a top-heavy bourgeois genre like the novel could never thrive in the provisional culture of the post-1922 Republic," only the "pure story-telling of short fiction."¹¹ Writers have indeed been questioning the assumptions and the facts – considering whether the novel genre, as contrasted with the short story, does need a structured society for success, and, essentially, whether the political, social and

⁶ Colm Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', in Dermot Bolger (ed.), *Letters from the New Island* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1991), 45.

⁷ Thomas Kilroy, 'Fiction', *University Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1968), 112-113.

⁸ Deborah Averill, *The Irish Short Story From George Moore to Frank O'Connor* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), 24.

⁹ Vivian Mercier, 'Introduction' in Vivian Mercier (ed.) *Great Irish Short Stories* (London: Abacus, 1992), 8.

¹⁰ Vivian Mercier, 'The Irish Short Story and Oral Tradition', in Ray Brown (ed.), *The Celtic Cross: Studies in Irish Culture and Literature* (Purdue: Purdue University Studies, 1964), 98.

¹¹ Paddy Bullard, 'In the World of Nora Barnacle', *Times Literary Supplement* (13 May 2005), 21.

literary conditions in Ireland between 1922 and 1960 were indeed inimical to quality novel writing.¹² Frank O'Connor was straightforward: "without the concept of a normal society – the novel is impossible."¹³ Behind the assertions that Irish society 'failed' the novel seem to be that, first, it lacked a stratified structure, particularly a middle-class; and second it was oppressive and fragmented. The argument that Ireland did not have a stratified society is refuted by such evidence as ethnographic studies of town and country, financial and other records, and memoirs.¹⁴ Far from being absent, Irish life was minutely controlled by status and class, involving land-holding and land inheritance, dwellings and occupations. C.S. Andrews claimed, "the Irish nation in the mass was a classless society."¹⁵ However, it was not a structured class system that was missing but its acknowledgement.

While the debate about a class system can be objectively settled, whether society was broken and fragmentary is a subjective judgement. Popular assumptions about Irish society have proved long-lasting. Maud Ellmann in 2011 could still claim that "Irish writers had to cope with the anti-intellectual, reactionary values of the Free State, headed by Éamon de Valera, whose vision of Ireland as a pastoral idyll,

¹² For example, Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2-5.

¹³ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (Hoboken N.J.: Melville House, 2004), 17.

¹⁴ For example, in the countryside, Edward Hirsch, 'The Imaginary Irish Peasant', *PMLA*, Vol. 106, No. 5 (October 1991), 1116-1133; and, in the city, Alexander J. Humphries, *New Dubliners. Urbanisation and the Irish Family* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

¹⁵ C. S. Andrews, *Man of No Property* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1982), 13.

decorated with 'athletic youths' and 'comely maidens', was enshrined in the constitution of Eire in 1937."¹⁶ Each of her assertions are challenged, if not contradicted, by the evidence. Ellmann is repeating almost as a slogan – 'de Valera's Ireland' – despite Caitriona Clear's warning that, incorrectly and inaccurately, "The three words 'de Valera's Ireland' are used to convey an oppressive, stagnant, uncomfortable social environment for women."¹⁷ And it was not just women. Averill suggests that "most Irish writers regarded their society as peculiar, self-defeating, and out-of-step with other western societies."¹⁸ Indeed the apologia for the novel tendered by Seán O'Faoláin and John McGahern seem more an excuse for vigorous criticism of their society. O'Faoláin presents his "picture of contemporary Irish society – acquisitive, bourgeois, unsophisticated, intellectually conservative and unadventurous."¹⁹ McGahern depicts it as "often bigoted, intolerant, cowardly, philistine and spiritually crippled."²⁰ Such popular and simplistic depictions are not supported by the evidence. That is not to argue that the opposite of these has any greater validity, for Ireland between 1922 and the 1960s was a particularly harsh

¹⁶ Maud Ellmann, 'The Irish Novel, 1914-1940', in Patrick Parrinder and Andrzej Gasiorek (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Novel in English Volume 4. The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 454-55.

¹⁷ Caitriona Clear, 'Women in de Valera's Ireland 1932-48: a reappraisal', in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (ed.), *De Valera's Irelands* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2003), 104.

¹⁸ Averill, *The Irish Short Story*, 24.

¹⁹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Ireland After Yeats', *The Bell*, Vol. XVII, No. 3 (June 1952), 46.

²⁰ John McGahern, quoted in Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk along the Irish Border* (London: Picador, 2001), 79.

environment for many individuals and groups. Ireland, as everywhere, had emerged from its own particular political and social historical experiences. The nation that developed at independence and in the decades that followed was indeed different, but in degree, so that it was not markedly exceptional, and certainly not unique.

Despite a civil war and on-going dissident activity, the rule of law was quickly achieved through an unarmed Garda Síochána, an effective judiciary and a parliamentary legislature and executive. An efficient civil administration ensured a smooth transition to an independent state. The assertion of independence by emphasising difference from Britain was achieved by revoking any connection with the crown, by an assertive foreign policy with other small nations, and by neutrality during World War Two. Ireland alone of the nations formed after World War One was to survive intact, and was one of the few that did not succumb to authoritarianism. The rights of citizens were protected by a Constitution freely chosen by popular vote. Ireland was not immune from the economic and other pressures affecting the Western world, and the reality of Irish life was in harsh contrast to the intentions of the state's leaders. However, much of the darkness and oppressiveness of the rhetoric needs to be interpreted in the imperative to "distinguish between the *ought* of our legislation and the more liberal *is* of our daily lives."²¹ Society is the amalgam of individuals and groups so it would be wrong to argue that Irish society was either repressed or out-going and vibrant. Many

²¹ Richard Kearney, 'Faith and Fatherland', *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1984), 55.

individuals chose to follow the traditional conservatism espoused by Church and State. It is equally clear that many did not, and instead enjoyed a liberated and modern lifestyle.

The society that emerges from this history is not broken and thus fragmented, but as in all societies, fragmentary as individuals move between and within their families, local communities and their work, interest, social and friendship groups. Even if the novelist did consider society broken this could have been an opportunity for imaginative exploration. Colm Tóibín argues, "John McGahern, and to an extent Francis Stuart, have used in their work the sense of Ireland as a fractured society which cannot offer a satisfactory habitation for the individual."²² The realist novel thrives on the experiences of non-conforming individuals as they try to find an accommodation with a society they find uncongenial. Supporters of O'Faoláin's argument claim that the novel failed because Ireland had no functioning society. Simultaneously, for the short story it is assumed that there was such a society. Averill points out: "One of the broadest and most pervasive themes in the Irish short story is the conflict between the individual and the community."²³ James Kilroy agrees: "the subject treated in nearly every short story is the individual's relationship to society."²⁴ The novel is such a flexible genre that it does not need a particular

²² Tóibín, 'Martyrs and Metaphors', 52.

²³ Averill, *The Irish Short Story*, 13.

²⁴ James F. Kilroy, 'Introduction', in James F. Kilroy (ed.), *The Irish Short Story* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 6.

construction of society for its location, otherwise there would not be successful examples from different countries in different periods of time. All these societies differ to some degree in structure, culture and traditions. It is implausible that only Ireland's society could not sustain the novel. Ireland's society was not one single monolithic mass, it was an amalgam of fluid groupings with a whole spectrum of political and cultural attitudes and behaviours. There were many different elements within such a society for the novelist to explore and narrate.

Julia O'Faoláin adds a further twist to the novel/society debate. She argues that her father and Frank O'Connor were mistaken in their claim that Irish society post-revolution lacked the complexity to sustain novels. She considered that the short story form did indeed work better than the novel for that generation of writers, and suggested that it was "because its open-ended form fitted the violence, the backtracking moves and the shifting values of their time."²⁵ For her, it was not the composition of society, but the nature of the times. However, politically, the times were not that chaotic. Most of independent Ireland's first generation of realist fiction writers – for example, Kate O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Seán O'Faolain, Liam O'Flaherty, Frank O'Connor and Peadar O'Donnell – had had their formative years in pre-independent Ireland. Each had been influenced in their individual ways by the pre-war years of Home Rule agitation, Irish Republican Brotherhood and Ulster

²⁵ Julia O'Faolain, 'The Irishman Who Stayed', in Marie Arndt et al. (eds), *Sean O'Faolain: A Centenary Celebration* (Turin: Tauben.2001), 27.

Volunteer Force drilling and threatening, the Easter Rising, World War One devastation and the War of Independence with Britain. Such years were turbulent and traumatic. In comparison, once the bloody but short Civil War was concluded, the first decades of Irish independence, whose society and culture the writers chronicled and interpreted in their fiction, were politically stable and relatively secure.

Ireland was, of course, in a state of flux – it was creating a complex new state. This, however, was an opportunity. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* explains the novel genre as developing alongside the establishment of nation states.²⁶ He argues the novel provides the means through which individuals in these nations can imagine themselves as citizens with a shared community identity. The development of this concept requires a standardised national language through which the unity can be communicated, an effective print industry to distribute the message, and a literate population to read and absorb it. These conditions for the novel's success were there in Ireland. What was needed were novelists of genius. Declan Kiberd asserts: "It is now clear that the greatest short stories, in both Irish and English, owe more to the narrative genius of their authors than to the Gaelic tradition of story-telling."²⁷ Kiberd is not looking for external reasons or excuses

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

²⁷ Declan Kiberd, 'Story-telling: The Gaelic Tradition' in Patrick Rafroidi and Terence Brown, *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), 23.

beyond the talent of the author. It seems inconsistent to claim that the short story's quality is a matter of the individual author's talent, yet the quality of the novel is not a failure of talent, but an external failure of the society of the day.

Frank O'Connor considered that Liam O'Flaherty was one of his generation's pre-eminent story writers, calling his 'Fairy Goose' "one of the great Irish short stories."²⁸ However, despite the acclaim that greeted some of O'Flaherty's novels, he found O'Flaherty the novelist seriously flawed. O'Connor argues "if one wished to write a thesis to show that the novel was not an Irish form but that the short story was, one could do worse than take O'Flaherty for text."²⁹ O'Connor was wrong. His own concept of what a novel should be was wedded to the aesthetics of the nineteenth century. He may have been tongue-in-cheek when he wrote, "novels were written exclusively by Jane Austin and Turgenev, and the secret died with them,"³⁰ but he possibly meant it. His opinion tallies with O'Faoláin who believed, "the novel is a social document; it is what Trollope wrote and Balzac wrote."³¹

O'Connor was subjectively judging O'Flaherty's novels as novels of manners by assessing such issues as quality of theme, plot and universality, of characterisation, style, tone and narrative technique. He was applying criteria appropriate for novels

²⁸ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 37.

²⁹ O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 36.

³⁰ Frank O'Connor, quoted in Michael Steinman(ed.), *The Happiness of getting It Down Right. Letters of Frank O'Connor and William Maxwell* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 15.

³¹ O'Faoláin, 'The Dilemma of Irish Letters', 374.

in the style of the nineteenth century to O'Flaherty who was determinedly rejecting those very criteria. O'Flaherty was a pioneer, trying, like Peadar O'Donnell, to get Irish life into a literature "written in English, but of Ireland for Ireland by Irish writers."³² O'Flaherty was not writing a novel of manners with an Irish theme and setting. He wanted a revolution in style and tone, to create an Irish mode which he conceived as "the wild tumult of the unchained storm, the tumult of the army on the march, clashing its cymbals, rioting with excess of energy."³³ Most successful Irish novels had to attract the English market, and eventually this market was not attracted to novels so brashly 'Irish', being accustomed to social novels of manners. In terms of the novel as he constructed it, O'Connor's comment would be more apt if he proposed himself or O'Faoláin as case-studies for the novel not being an Irish form. O'Flaherty was more successful with his Irish-form novels than they were with their English-form novels. Perhaps, in fact, Ireland did have its fair share of acclaimed novelists. During the period 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, America, with a population in 1940 of 134.1 million³⁴, produced novelists of international stature in John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway; the United Kingdom, with a population in 1936 of 44.7 million³⁵, could claim the already established E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf with Aldous Huxley,

³² Peadar O'Donnell, 'Young Irish Writers', *the Commonweal* (26 April 1933), 717.

³³ Liam O'Flaherty, quoted in Patrick F. Sheeran, *the Novels of Liam O'Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976), 88.

³⁴ <http://www.1940.census.archives.gov/> Accessed 29.03.2016.

³⁵ A.J.P.Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (London: Book Club associates, 1977), 301n.

Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh. Ireland, with its 2.9 million³⁶ in 1946, produced James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett with at least their status, and Flann O'Brien, Liam O'Flaherty and Kate O'Brien a distance behind.

Declan Kiberd notes: "In the years in which the modern Irish nation took shape, the short story was the form in which many writers chose to depict their vision of the emerging Ireland".³⁷ Perhaps it was not simply choice, but more an imperative. Nadine Gordimer argues that, for writers, the short story's popularity over the novel may have had practical motivations. Economic necessity may have been the priority. She points out: "The novel that doesn't sell represents anything from one to five years work – years that, economically speaking, then, the locusts have eaten," whereas if a short story doesn't find a home, "it does not represent the same loss in terms of working time. Other stories have been written within the same few months or the same year that enable the writer to go on eating."³⁸ She explains that stories that generate an income as part of a published collection may well have previously been sold as a one-off to a magazine, and afterwards may appear in anthologies. On the other hand, "once out of the best-seller class (and this would

³⁶ <http://cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=cna13>. Accessed 29.03.2016

³⁷ Declan Kiberd, 'Story-Telling', 15.

³⁸ Nadine Gordimer, 'The Flash of Fireflies', in Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), 266.

include a majority of serious novels, and virtually all experimental ones) a novel is dead, so far as sales are concerned, after a year."³⁹

There are very many novels written, but most have little impact on market or memory. Critics and academics by the nature of their task construct hierarchies. Even for works of recognised quality, failure to be designated to even a minor canon of novelists condemns to obscurity. Time brings new attitudes to life and its literature, and fresh novels to occupy readers' leisure hours. Disparaging the Irish novel to its potential market, as O'Faoláin's beliefs did, inevitably undermined novelists already competing in a crowded market. Even by 1968, it was in the interests of a younger generation of writers to question the O'Faoláin/O'Connor thesis, which predicated their novels as inevitably inadequate. Thomas Kilroy, pointing out that O'Faoláin's "cultural idea" has become a "slogan", declares:

There are signs that possibly new terms have to be found to describe more recent Irish writing. For instance, it would appear that the Irish short story has begun to exhaust itself. Many of the more recent writers have written short stories and very fine ones at that but it is their novels which identify them. Brian Moore, Edna O'Brien, John Broderick, and, later, Patrick Boyle, Aidan Higgins, John McGahern. One could add to this list but the point should already be made: there can no longer be serious talk about a mediocrity in recent Irish novels.⁴⁰

O'Flaherty, O'Faoláin and O'Connor had felt obliged to bury the legacy of the Cultural Revival writers with their myths of an idealised Ireland. Now it was their own turn to be dressed in grave clothes. John Montague dramatically did the deed.

³⁹ Gordimer, 'The Flash of Fireflies', 267.

⁴⁰ Kilroy, 'Fiction', 113.

Surveying the exuberant and no-holds-barred behaviour at the Fleadh Cheoil, in 'The Siege of Mullingar' he concluded:

Puritan Ireland's dead and gone,
A myth of O'Connor and O'Faoláin.⁴¹

By the 1960s, it was already too late for the earlier generation. As Benedict Kiely, himself an under-rated novelist, commented:

It was one of the O'Connor crotchets to argue that his contemporary Ireland could produce interesting short-story writers as it could not produce interesting novelists. This was an argument that pleasantly ignored the existence of Kate O'Brien, Samuel Beckett, Brinsley MacNamara, Francis MacManus, Flann O'Brien, Francis Stuart, Peadar O'Donnell, Mervyn Wall and Forrest Reid, and paid no account whatever to the bulk of Elizabeth Bowen, Liam O'Flaherty, three fine novels by Seán O'Faoláin, the satirical romances of Austin Clarke, James Stephens, and so on.⁴²

Kilroy, while politely dismissing O'Faoláin's 'slogan', was happy to perpetrate O'Faoláin's emphasis on the *Irish novel*, and the *Irish short story*. While Irishness may well have been a marketing unique-selling-point, it is debatable that it enhanced the product as serious literature which explores universal issues and has applicability beyond its time and place. Stressing Irishness in a period when the new state was trying to create an identity may have been understandable, but by the mid-1930s, Ireland had achieved a distinctive identity and an acknowledged independence. Literature may have been better served to have listened to Francis Stuart: "National

⁴¹ John Montague, 'The Siege of Mullingar', *The Cork Review* (Cork: The Triskel Arts Centre, 1991), 52.

⁴² Benedict Kiely, 'The International Symposium of the Short Story - Ireland', *Kenyon Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 4 (1968), 464.

literature is to my mind a meaningless term. Literature can't be national. Literature is individual. Nationality has nothing to do with it."⁴³ Perhaps fiction by Irish writers in Irish settings and concerning characters who happen to be Irish has acquired a different reputation and standing because some later authors focus on writing a novel or a short story, and not on writing an *Irish* novel or an *Irish* short story. Nonetheless, the concept of the *Irish* short story has proved hardy, for in 2016 Jaki McCarrick in the *Irish Times* discussed a short story festival with the title 'What is it about the Irish?'⁴⁴

The evidence from history and from the novels themselves suggest that O'Faoláin was wrong both about the nature of Irish society and the quality of its novels. He has more support for his views that Irish society was conducive to short story writing. His argument falters when he suggests that Irish society was fragmented and it was this very fragmentation that made the Irish short story so effective and popular, and then goes on to claim that the short story can only succeed in fragmented societies. For O'Faoláin the Irish novel needed a normal society and did not get it, while the Irish short story needed a broken society and got it. Society between the 1920s and the 1960s may not have been broken, but it was certainly complex and fluid enough to provide endless moments and characters to be narrated by talented short story writers. The flaw is Irish exclusivity.

⁴³ Francis Stuart, quoted in Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 16.

⁴⁴ Jaki McCarrick, 'What's the real story behind the success of the Irish short story?', *Irish Times* (22 February 2016).

The short story flourished in the Ireland of this period, but it also flourished in different periods before and after O'Faoláin's time. It also flourished in other countries and periods of time within societies that were very different from each other. Perhaps O'Faoláin found sufficient inspiration in the loose and fragmented top-soil of Irish society as it established its independence. Had he continued and dug deeper, as others did, he may have come to a firmer substratum where there was a continuing tradition full of characters and situations ready to be brought to the surface and examined at length. O'Faoláin, it seems, in developing his ideas about the relationship between society and fictional forms, may have lost sight of his own basic principles. He explains how a gap in his education was filled: "Harvard did it within sixty seconds when my professor of philology gently intimated (or perhaps the better word is conveyed) that it is impolite for anybody to make a statement he cannot prove."⁴⁵ His own statements that the Ireland of the post-independence decades could not sustain quality novel writing as, simultaneously, it enhanced short story writing, are at best unproven but more likely on the evidence to be wrong. Seán O'Faoláin was, in his journalism, often deliberately impolitic; it seems in his literary criticism he was occasionally inadvertently impolite.

⁴⁵ O'Faoláin, 'A Portrait', 16.

Appendix A: Brief biographical and bibliographical notes on some of Ireland's novelists writing between 1922 – early 1960s.¹

Margaret Barrington (1896-1982)

Born in Co. Donegal, she was the daughter of a district inspector of police, and was educated in Donegal, Kerry and Dublin, where she attended Trinity College Dublin. Married historian Edmund Curtis in 1922, and then, after the marriage was dissolved, married Liam O'Flaherty. She had one child with O'Flaherty before they separated. During the 1930s she emigrated to England, where she wrote her novel *My Cousin Justin* (1939). Set in pre-independence Ireland it describes an idyllic upbringing of a young girl and her cousin playing with others without much thought of religious or class division before adult interference introduces bigotry and gender injustices. Barrington involved herself in social and political issues helping refugees from Hitler's Germany, and organising support for republicans in the Spanish Civil War. She returned to Ireland on the outbreak of war, settling in West Cork, where she wrote a collection of short stories.

My Cousin Justin (1939) (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990).

Brendan Behan (1923-1964)

Born in inner-city Dublin to an educated working-class family. His uncle Peadar Kearney wrote the national anthem; his brother Dominic was a well-known songwriter/ singer while his brother Brian was also a well-known actor, playwright

¹ Only novels read and consulted during the study are identified by full publishing details. Main reference sources include Anne M. Brady and Brian Cleeve (eds), *A Biographical Dictionary of Irish Writers* (Mullingar: Lilliput Press, 1985); Margaret Drabble (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ann Owens Weekes, *Unveiling Treasures. The Attic Guide to the Published Works of Irish Women Literary Writers* (Dublin: Attic Press 1993); and Robert Welch (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). <http://www.ricorso.net/> (Accessed at various times 2014-2016)

and author and was, like Brendan, a prominent political activist. His father, Stephen, a house painter (as also was Brendan) who had been active during the War of Independence, regularly read classic European literature to his children. His mother Kathleen was herself politically active and had been a personal friend of Michael Collins. The family moved to a council house in Crumlin in 1937. Brendan joined the Fianna Éireann, the youth organisation of the IRA, in whose *Fianna: the Voice of Young Ireland* his first prose and poetry was published. He joined the IRA aged sixteen, and was arrested when he set out on a self-appointed mission to blow-up Liverpool docks. Charged with possession of explosives he was sentenced to three years custody in a borstal institution (Youth custody and training prisons) at Hollesley Bay Borstal, Suffolk. In 1942 he was sentenced to fourteen years in prison for the planned and attempted murder of two Garda Síochána detectives. Released in the general amnesty for IRA prisoners in 1946, he served a short prison term for an attempted prison break-out of an IRA member from Manchester Prison. This was his last involvement with IRA activities. His early work, written when imprisoned, was published in literary journals including *Envoy* and *The Bell*. Having learned Irish in prison, he spent some time in the Gaeltacht areas of Galway and Kerry, producing poetry in Irish. Drinking heavily, he moved to Paris in the early 1950s. He returned to Ireland, still drinking heavily, with a developing reputation for his writings and for himself as a Dublin literary ‘character’ associating with Flann O’Brien, Anthony Cronin, and Patrick Kavanagh – though the last-named developed a deeply-felt personal hatred. His 1954 play *The Quare Fellow* established his reputation. This was followed by his Irish language play *An Giall* 1957 translated and produced in English as *The Hostage* 1958. His autobiographical novel *Borstal Boy* 1958 was based on his borstal experiences, and brought him considerable publicity. His heavy drinking – which he used to confirm his ‘wild Irishman’ reputation for an English market – led to diabetes, and to public collapses. As he became more ill, he was rejected by the audience he had played to. His last books *Brendan Behan’s Island* and *Brendan Behan’s*

New York had to be transcribed from tapes and were insubstantial and unsuccessful. He collapsed in a bar one evening and died in hospital aged 41.

*Borstal Boy*² (1958) (London: Corgi Books, 1958)

Hold Your Own and Have Another (1963) (London: Corgi Books, 1963)

Bridget Boland (1913-1988)

Born in England, the daughter of an Irish barrister John Pius Boland, who was Member of Parliament for South Kerry (1908-1918), which involved much travel between Kerry and London. Bridget was educated at Sacred Heart School, Roehampton, and at Oxford from where she graduated in 1935. She became a successful screenwriter and dramatist, published three novels, a memoir and a book on gardening. She was a regular visitor to France, and lived in Italy for a number of years.

The Wild Geese (1938)

Portrait of a Lady in Love (1942)

Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973)

Born in Dublin into an Anglo-Irish family, her early years, recorded in *Seven Winters* 1942, were spent between Dublin and her family's ancestral home Bowen's Court in Cork. Her father, a barrister, began to suffer a mental illness from 1907, and Elizabeth and her mother were sent to England where they lived in various south coast seaside resorts. After her mother's death in 1912, Elizabeth spent time with an aunt in Harpenden, at a boarding-school in Kent and on holidays at Bowen's Court. In 1921, after a brief spell as an art student, in echoes of *The Last September* (1929), she became engaged to an English army lieutenant based in Ireland. After some family opposition the engagement was soon broken off. As an only child she inherited

² Books banned under the Censorship of Publications Act 1929 are identified with an asterisk*.

Bowen's Court in 1931, which she and her husband used as a holiday residence. The house was later to be sold (1960) and then demolished, much to her distress. She recounted the history of her family and of the house itself in *Bowen's Court* (1942). In 1923 she published her first short story collection, and married Alan Cameron a war veteran and teacher. Their childless marriage lasted until his death at Bowen's Court in 1952, despite the series of love affairs she conducted, and her life within a large literary circle that excluded him. Her first novels *The Hotel* (1927) and *The Last September* (1929) both involved short-lived engagements with youthful innocence counterpointed by an older woman's baleful interference. She became a prolific writer of short story collections, believing that in the short story form she could portray extremes of human experience that the novel form could not sustain. Her novels, mainly set in England, deal with the tensions and passions that are hidden beneath a veneer of respectability; innocence with its fantasies and insecurities coping – or not - with manipulation and betrayal. *The Heat of the Day* (1949), uses her wartime experiences as an Air-Raid Precautions warden in London, and her travels back and forth to Ireland, after which she reported to the Ministry of Information on conditions and attitudes there. Her only other novel with an Irish setting was *A World of Love* (1955). After the war she travelled and lectured as well as writing further novels and short story collections, travel books, histories and literary criticism. She was awarded the CBE in 1948, and a Companion of Literature in 1965. She spent her last years at Hythe, Kent.

The Last September (1929) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942)

The Heat of the Day (1949) (London: Vintage, 1998)

A World of Love (1955) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)

Elizabeth Brennan (1907- ?)

Born and educated in Dublin, she later lived in England and in Sligo. She wrote several plays, and was a prolific novelist and writer of stories for children. Her novels, usually adventures and romances, are often set in an idealised countryside with haunting castles and ruins. Her first novel *Out of the Darkness* was published in 1945, and her last, *Girl on an Island* – which won an Irish Countrywomen's Association award – in 1984.

Out of the Darkness (1945)

Am I My Brother's Keeper? (1946) (Dublin: Metropolitan Publishing, 1946)

Whispering Walls (1948)

Wind Over the Bogs (1950)

His Glamorous Cousin (1963)

John Broderick (1927-1989)

Born and educated in Athlone, Co. Westmeath, where his family – and eventually himself – owned a substantial bakery. He lived in Athlone and Dublin, before moving in later years to Bath. His novels, set in the Irish midlands, offer a bitter commentary on Irish life, often from the perspective of gay men. Many of his women are alarming, his men malleable and his priests hypocritical. His criticism of Irish society, especially the greed of the 'gombeen man' who he saw as the corrupting centre of the new bourgeoisie, was moderated in his later novels as he reflected a more tolerant Ireland. His novels contain many examples of succinct and perceptive writing, though with occasional rather intrusive criticism of society.

*The Pilgrimage** (1961) (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004)

The Fugitives (1962) (London: Pan Books, 1976)

Don Juaneen (1963) (London: Panther Books, 1965)

The Waking of Willie Ryan (1965) (London: Panther Books, 1969)

John Brophy (1900-1965)

Born in Liverpool to Irish parents. Lying about his age, he joined the infantry at fourteen and served throughout World War One. His wartime experiences are the basis of many of his books, as were his experiences in the Home Guard in World War Two. He gained a government grant to attend Liverpool University, and later spent a year at Durham University studying psychoanalysis. He married Charis Weare Grundy, with whom he taught in Egypt for two years before ill-health forced his return to England. A prolific writer, mainly of novels but also of collections and anthologies, screenplays, reminiscences and biography. Several of his novels were banned under the Censorship of Publications Act. His daughter Brigid Brophy was also a novelist, and a well-known activist especially in gender, animal rights and copyright issues.

Peter Lavelle (1929)

*Pluck the Flower** (1929)

The Bitter End (1931)

Epitaph for Two Parents of the Old School (1931)

Thunderclap (1931)

*The Rocky Road** (1932)

*The World Went Mad** (1934)

*Waterfront** (1934)

I Let Him Go (1935)

Hotch Potch (1936)

*The Ramparts of Virtue** (1936)

Behold the Judge (1938)

*Gentlemen of Stratford** (1939)
The Ridiculous Hat (1939)
*Green Ladies** (1940)
*Green Glory** (1940)
Immortal Sergeant (1943)
Spearhead (1943)
Target Island (1944) (London: Corgi Books, 1954)
*City of Departures** (1946)
The Woman from Nowhere (1946)
The Human Face (1946)
Sarah (1948)
Flesh and Blood (1948)
Body and Soul (1948)
Julian's Way (1949)
Fixed Bayonets (1951)
*Windfall** (1951)
*Turn the Key Softly** (1951)
*The Prime of Life** (1951)
*The Nimble Rabbit** (1955)
The Prince and Petronella (1956)
*Soldier of the Queen** (1957)
The Day they Robbed the Bank of England (1960)
The Front Door Key (1960)

Donn Byrne (1889-1928)

Born Brian Oswald Donn-Byrne in New York, he was brought up in Armagh and the Glens of Antrim. Studied at UCD, Leipzig and Paris. He returned to America in

1911. His Irish fiction combined elements of mythical Gaelic and pastoral Anglo-Irish traditions, with dramatic plots, often involving Irish historical characters in scenic settings in stories of love or rebellion. A prolific novelist and short story writer in America, his stories published in magazines there became increasingly sentimental and critical of any modernising improvements in Ireland, such as the Shannon electrification scheme. He returned to Ireland, buying Coolmain Castle Co. Cork. He was killed in a car accident at nearby Courtmacsharry Bay. A collection of his poems was published posthumously.

The Wind Bloweth (1922)

Blind Raftery and his Wife, Hilaria (1924)

Hangman's House (1925) (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1926)

O'Malley of Shanganagh (1925)

Destiny Bay (1928)

Crusade (1928)

Power of the Dog (1929)

The Golden Goat (1930)

Michael Campbell (1924-1984)

Born in Dublin and educated at St. Columba's College, then at Trinity College and King's Inn. He became the London correspondent for *Irish Times*.

Peter Perry (1956)

Mary, This London (1959)

Joyce Cary (1888-1957)

Born in Derry into an Anglo-Irish family whose family home was Castle Cary in Inishowen, Co. Donegal. Following his grandfather's financial problems as a result

of the 1881 Land Act, Cary spent his childhood in London where his father worked as a civil engineer, returning for visits to his grandmother's home also on the Inishowen peninsula. In 1909 he attended Trinity College Oxford to study law. In 1912 he served in the Red Cross in Montenegro, joining the Nigerian Colonial Service in 1913. At the outbreak of the World War he served as a Second Lieutenant in the Cameroons campaign. In 1916 he was wounded in action and invalided back to London. There he married Gertrude Ogilvie. In 1917 he was appointed Assistant District Officer in charge of Bougu in Nigeria. Leaving the Colonial Service in 1920, he settled in Oxford. His first novel, set in Africa, was published in 1932. *Castle Corner* (1938) – a novel connecting his interest in Africa, Ireland and England – explores the changes in civilisation and thought at the turn of the century. His novels reflect his beliefs in a country's right to self-determination, and to the individual's right to personal freedom.

*Castle Corner** (1938) (London: Michael Joseph, 1952)

*Charley is My Darling** (1940)

*Herself Surprised** (1941)

*The Horse's Mouth** (1944)

*A Fearful Joy** (1949)

*Not Honour More** (1955)

A House of Children (1941)

Austin Clarke (1896-1974)

Born (Augustine Joseph) in Dublin to a father who was a Corporation water official and to a mother who valued her Catholicism. His mother's influence was to remain lifelong. Educated by the Jesuits at Belvedere, he then studied at UCD under Douglas Hyde and Thomas MacDonagh, from both of whom he developed his cultural nationalism and his commitment to a distinctively Irish literature. He

succeeded to MacDonagh's lectureship following his execution in 1916. After the death of his father, and an unhappy relationship with an older poet Geraldine Cummins, he suffered a mental collapse requiring confinement in hospital, where failed shock treatment accerbated his condition. In 1920 he married Cummins in a Dublin Registry Office, and consequently, possibly because of the civil rather than church marriage, he lost his lectureship. He had met Yeats who was hoping for a school of Irish Catholic poets, but Clarke was more interested in sensual images drawn from pagan rituals and Irish mythology. Later, Yeats was to offend him greatly by not including any of his poetry in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936). In 1921 he published both *The Fires of Baal* and *The Sword of the West*. In 1922 he moved to London where he earned a living as a book-reviewer. His interest in Irish poetry and its tones and rhythms, and in Medieval Ireland's mixture of pagan and Christian elements are evident in his poetry and plays. He won the Tailteann Award for poetry 1932. This interest in the medieval is reflected in his three novels. The psychological tensions, and the conscience-stricken mind that he explores, were paralleled in his own life. After his return to Dublin in 1937 with his future wife, Nora Walker, and the failure of his divorce action against Cummins, Clarke suffered a further nervous breakdown. The emotional conflicts, and the guilt of conscience are present in the verse plays that he wrote in the 1930s and 1940s. His poetry after 1955 developed to include social commentary, highlighting especially Church and state collaborations in social injustices. He wrote two autobiographies and two studies of literary criticism.

*Bright Temptation** (1932) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932)

*The Singing-Men at Cashel** (1936) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936)

*Sun Dances at Easter** (1952) (London: Andrew Melrose, 1952)

Brian Cleeve (1921-2003)

Born in Essex to a Limerick family. Educated at St. Edward's, Oxford, but ran away to sea in 1938. During the Second World War he served with the merchant navy, and also in counter-intelligence. He settled in Dublin where he worked as a journalist, and travelled whenever the opportunity arose. Wrote several novels, the first in 1952, the last in 1993. He compiled a *Dictionary of Irish Writers* (3 Vols.: 1967-1971).

The Far Hills (1952)

*Portrait of My City** (1953)

*Birth of a Dark Soul** (1953)

Assignment to Vengeance (1961)

Death of a Painted Lady (1962)

Padraig Colum (1881-1972)

Born in Longford, the son of a workhouse manager, educated at Glashule and UCD. He had his first success as a dramatist with *Broken Soil* (1903), *The Land* (1905) and *Thomas Muskerry* (1910). The first two were applauded as examples of a new realism in Irish drama, moving away from Yeats' Celtic visions. *Thomas Muskerry* was considered by many as over-gloomy. Married Mary Maguire in 1912, emigrating with her to America in 1914, and remaining there. His gift for dramatic lyrics and dialogue was evident in his collections of poetry. The *Flying Swans* is a bildungsroman in which the aimless life of the father is rejected by the son. Themes of rejection and re-acceptance, with echoes of mythology are considered. He was a noted writer of many popular children's books. He wrote historical and biographical works, and literary criticism. Mary Colum's recollections of their acquaintance with Joyce in Paris is recorded in *Our Friend James Joyce* (1957). Padraig's short story collection *The Big Tree* (1935) was illustrated by Jack B. Yeats.

Castle Conquer (1923)

The Flying Swans (1957) (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1969)

Vivian Connell (1905-1981)

Born in Cork. Without formal education, he was taught to read by his father. Lived in Ireland until he was thirty, where his prime interest was hunting. His first story was published by AE in *The Irish Statesman*, then nothing for ten years. Wrote plays *Throng o' Scarlet* (1941; *The Nineteenth Hole of Europe* (1943) before writing a series of novels, the best known of which are *The Chinese Room* (1943), a wartime best seller (over 3.5 million copies sold) exploring sexual freedom, and *The Hounds of Cloneen* (1951), set amongst the fox-hunting circles of Cobh, County Cork, and touching on the post-War of Independence compromises achieved between the elites of the English military, the Anglo-Irish gentry and the local Irish. Lived in England and France.

*The Squire of Shaftesbury Avenue** (1941)

*The Peacock is a Gentleman** (1942)

*The Chinese Room** (1943) (London: Corgi, 1966)

*The Golden Sleep** (1948)

*The Hounds of Cloneen** (1951) (London: Hutchinson, 1951)

*A Man of Parts** (1951)

*September in Quinze** (1952)

Bachelors Anonymous (1957)

The Stolen Pearls (1961)

Corinna Lang, Goodbye (1963)

The Dream and The Flesh (1963)

The Love Lush (1965)

The Naked Rich (1965)

[Patrick] Rearden Conner (1907-1991)

Born in Dublin, he was educated by the Presentation Brothers in Cork. Went to England in 1924, where he worked as a landscape gardener. His first novel *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1935) was chosen as a Literary Guild selection in the United States, and was later filmed in Dublin (1960). He also wrote many short stories.

*Shake Hands with the Devil** (1933)

*Rude Earth** (1934)

Salute to Aphrodite (1935)

Time to Kill (1936)

Men Must Live (1937)

A Plain Tale from the Bogs (1937)

*The Sword of Love** (1938)

*The Devil Amongst the Tailors** (1947)

*My Love to the Gallows** (1949)

*Hunger of the Heart** (1949)

*The Singing Stone** (1951)

*The House of Cain** (1952)

Dorothea Conyers (1871-1949)

Minnie Dorothea Speight, born in Fedamore, Co.Limerick, daughter of Colonel J. Blood Smyth, married Lieutenant Charles Conyers who died in 1915. She re-married Captain Joseph White in 1917. Her very many popular, romantic novels – the first of

which were published around 1900 – had Anglo-Irish settings, and were usually concerned with hunting and the business of buying and selling horses. Her typical heroine visits the idyllic family estate in Ireland where they, as landlords, are respected and popular with their faithful Irish retainers. Died in Limerick.

The Toll of the Black Lake (1922)

Rooted Out (1923)

Sandy and Others (1925)

Treasury Notes (1926)

Hounds of the Sea (1927)

Grey Brothers and Others (1927)

Bobbie (1928)

Follow Elizabeth (1929)

The Strayings of Sandy (1930)

Hunting and Hunted (1930)

Managing Ariadne (1931)

Whoopee (1932)

A Maeve Must Marry (1933)

A Good Purpose (1934)

Maeve (1935)

Sally (1935)

The Fortunes of Evadne (1935)

The Elf (1936)

Sandy Married (1937)

Phil's Castle (1937)

A Lady of Discretion (1938)

Gulls at Rosnacorey (1939)

The Best People (1941)

Rosalie (1945)

Dark (1946)

Kicking Foxes (1948)

A Kiss for a Whip (1948)

The Witch's Samples (1950)

Kathleen Coyle (1886-1952)

Brought up in Derry and Donegal. Lived in Paris before settling with her husband, Charles Maher, in New York. Her novels were often intensely emotional psychological studies in the realism mode.

Piccadilly (1923)

A Widow's House (1924)

Shule Agra (1927)

It's Better to Tell (1927)

Youth in the Saddle (1927)

Liv (1928) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2000).

A Flock of Birds (1930) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1999).

There is a Door (1931)

The French Husband (1932)

Undue Fulfilment (1934)

Family Skeleton (1934)

Morning Comes Early (1934)

Immortal Ease (1939)

Who Dwell with Wonder (1940)

Brittany Summer (1940)

Major and the Others (1942)

Josephine (1942)

To Hold Against Famine (1942)

Anne Crone (1915-1972)

Born in Dublin, and educated at Methodist College, Belfast and Oxford University. Her novels have a rural Ulster setting – Co. Fermanagh – and concern loving relationships frustrated by class and religious differences. While illustrating bigotry, often humourously, the author's own tradition is rarely overt. She considers the emotional and intellectual development of her young women characters, affected by, but not controlled by, the conditions and passions of Ulster. She was a teacher and died in Belfast.

Bridie Steen (1948) (Dublin: Arlen House, 1984)

The Pleasant Lea (1952)

My Heart and I (1955)

Geraldine Cummins (1890-1969)

Born in Cork and educated privately. Active in the woman's suffrage movement. She was married – for ten days – to Austin Clarke in 1920. She wrote two plays, both produced at the Abbey, a book on psychical research, a biography of Edith Somerville, a book of short stories, and two novels with a feminist aspect, the first *The Land They Loved* (1919). Much of her fictional work was set in Munster and concerned peasant life. She left much unpublished work about psychical research which she claimed was dictated to her by her guiding spirit, Astor.

Fires of Beltane (1936)

Alice Curtayne (1901-1981)

Born in Tralee, Co. Kerry, and educated in England and in Italy. Married writer Stephen Rynne in 1935. Wrote some religious works including *Saint Catherine of Siena* (1929), a study of Lough Derg and *Irish Saints for Boys and Girls* (1955), biography, history, and edited the poetry of Francis Ledwidge.

House of Cards (1940)

Louis Lynch D'Alton (1900-1951)

Born in Dublin, he was the son of Charles D'Alton a comic actor and actor-manager. As a child he was taken on long tours around Britain with his father's travelling company. He worked for a period as a civil servant. As a young man he formed his own company for whom he wrote and produced his own plays. This apprenticeship served to make him one of the Abbey's most professional and popular playwrights with many successful plays and productions to his credit. His novel, *Death Is So Fair* (1936), was based on the revolutionary period 1916-1921. *Rags and Sticks* (1936) charts the decline of a touring company.

Death is So Fair (1936) (London: William Heinemann, 1936)

*Rags and Sticks** (1936)

Nicolette Devas (1912-1987)

Born in Co. Clare, her father Francis MacNamara was cousin of Brinsley MacNamara. Her sister Caitlín married Dylan Thomas. As a child she lived in England with Augustus John's family, and thus met many famous figures from the art and literary world. She wrote two memoirs about life with her father and with Augustus John, and one novel that successfully narrates family life from children's perspectives.

Bonfire (1958)

Nightwatch (1961)

Eilís Dillon (1920-1994)

Born in Galway, her father Thomas was professor of chemistry at University College, Galway and her mother was Geraldine Plunkett. As a child her family background ensured she met the leading nationalist revolutionaries, politicians, business people, academics and artists of the day. Her parents countered this by sending her to local schools to meet and understand the Gaelic tradition, and the meaning of poverty. In 1940 she married Cormac O Cuilleánáin with whom she had three daughters, one of whom is Eiléan Ní Cuilleánáin, the poet. Widowed in 1970, she married writer and critic Vivian Mercier in 1974. She lecture-toured in American Universities, and in Moscow, as well as teaching creative writing and working as writer-in-residence in America and in Ireland. She wrote several plays that have been staged in Dublin, collections of short stories, many works of fiction for children and young adults, poetry, translations and much journalism. Her novels were often set in the revolutionary years, and depict the fears of the young combatants. Her novels also give insights into life in Connemara in the early decades of independent Ireland.

Sent to His Account (1954)

Death in the Quadrangle (1956)

The Bitter Class (1958) (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1981)

The Head of the Family (1960) (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1982)

Bold John Henebry (1965)

John Patrick Donleavy (1926-)

Born in Brooklyn, New York, the son of an Irish-born fireman, he was educated locally. He served in the United States' Navy. He entered Trinity College Dublin in 1946. After marrying Valerie Heron, he moved to London in 1953. He returned to

live in Co. Westmeath, and has remarried (Mary Wilson Price). His first two novels, *The Ginger Man* (1955) and *The Singular Man* (1963) successfully achieved notoriety, through racy themes and expletive-laden prose, and considerable sales.

*The Ginger Man** (1955) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968)

*A Singular Man** (1963) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966)

Alan Downey (1889- ?)

Born Norwood, London, father Edmund. Educated at London University. Was editor of *Waterford News*.

The Green Path (1926)

Forty One (1928)

Jade House (1934)

Revd. William George Dowsley (1871-1947)

Born in Clonmel, and educated at the Royal University. He worked at several clerical jobs before being ordained into the Anglican Ministry at Bristol in 1901. Emigrated to South Africa in 1903 as chaplain and master at St. Andrew's College, Grahamstown. He wrote plays, books on farming and contributed to several Irish journals. His novels took a nationalist view of Irish history. *Far Away Cows Wear Long Horns* (1931) won the Bronze Medal at the 1930 Aonach Tailteann Games. He served for many years as rector of St. Stephen's, Capetown, where he died in 1947.

The Travelling Men (1925)

Far Away Cows Have Long Horns (1931)

Lord Dunsany (1878-1957)

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett was born in London and educated at Eton. He succeeded to the title and the Co. Meath estate in 1899. Joining the Coldstream

guards, he served in the Transvaal during the Boer War. At the outbreak of World War One, he joined Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, and was in action with the 10th (Irish) Division. On leave at Easter 1916, he was wounded in the face as he travelled to Dublin to join the Crown forces. He later served in the London War Office. He wrote many plays, several of which were produced at the Abbey. He also wrote memoirs, travel books, essays, and some autobiographical work. Seán O'Faoláin described him as a 'master of the short story', while his novels, some realistic some fantastical, were well-received. Remembered as a patron of writers, he was responsible for discovering the Meath poet Francis Ledwidge, and gave his support to Mary Lavin and Anne Crone, amongst others.

The Chronicles of Rodriguez (1922)

The King of Elfland's Daughter (1924) (London: Unwin, 1982)

The Charwoman's Shadow (1926)

My Talks with Dean Spanley (1926)

The Blessing of Pan (1927)

The Curse of the Wise Woman (1933)

The Story of Mona Sheehy (1939)

Jorgens has a Large Whiskey (1940)

Guerrilla (1944)

Michael Farrell (1899-1962)

Born in Carlow into a well-to-do family. Studied medicine at UCD. Was briefly imprisoned during the War of Independence for possession of illegal documents. Went to the Belgian Congo returning to Ireland in the early 1930s. Left medicine for business and broadcasting. Wrote for *The Bell* as amateur drama correspondent and, from 1943-1954, as 'Lemuel Gulliver'. He wrote a long novel *Thy Tears Might Cease*

which he could never bring himself to edit. Monk Gibbon did so, and the novel became a best-seller after Farrell's death.

Thy Tears Might Cease (1963) (London: Arrow Books, 1968)

Darrell Figgis (1882-1925)

Born in Dublin then brought up in India. Worked with Erskine Childers in the Howth gun- running in 1914. Involved in drawing up the Constitution of the Irish Free State, and was a member of Dáil Éireann. A cultural nationalist, he wrote about the nationalist tradition, as well as poetry, literary criticism, an Abbey play, and five novels. His *The House of Success* (1921) compared a businessman's practical views with those of his son's nationalism, finding fault with both. *The Return of the Hero* (1923) (foreword by James Stephens) depicts a conversation between Oisín and Saint Patrick in which Christianity is bested. Was a member of an embattled broadcasting commission when he committed suicide.

The House of Success (1921)

The Return of the Hero (1923) (London: Chapman and Dodd, 1923). [pseudonym: Michael Ireland]

Barbara Fitzgerald (née Gregg) (1911-1982)

Born in Cork. Daughter of the then Bishop of Ossory and later Primate of the Church of Ireland, Archbishop Gregg. After marriage spent many years in Africa. Her *We Are Besieged* (1946), was a big house novel dealing with a burning-out, and *Footprint upon Water* (written in 1955 but not published until 1983) concerns the experiences of the young women of the Anglo-Irish middle-class as they deal with the changed social and political realities, giving insights into a disappearing social world.

We Are Besieged (1946) (Bantry: Somerville Press, 2011)

Footprint Upon Water (1955 pub.1983) (Bantry: Somerville Press, 19

[William] Monk Gibbon (1896-1987)

Born in Dublin and educated at St. Columba's College and Oxford. Served in World War One, until invalided out in 1917 with nervous debility. Wrote *Inglorious Soldier* (1968) of the murder of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington at Portobello Barracks where Gibbon was stationed during the Easter Rising. Wrote collections of poetry, an unflattering literary critique of Yeats *The Masterpiece and the Man* (1959) He wrote two factual-fictions – *The Seals* (1935) an account of a hunting trip and also a consideration of human cruelty, and *Mount Ida* (1948), a creative recollection of three love affairs from his career as a schoolmaster. He prepared for posthumous publication, the manuscript of his friend Michael Farrell's *Thy Tears Might Cease* 1963.

The Seals (1936) (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1970)

Mount Ida (1948) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1983)

Oliver St John Gogarty (1878-1957)

Born in Dublin to a wealthy and fashionable doctor, he was educated at Mungret, Stoneyhurst, the Royal University and Trinity College, where he studied medicine. Acquired a reputation as a noted Dublin wit. Won prizes for his poetry. Appears as Mulligan in *Ulysses*, living in the Martello tower at Sandycove that he had rented. His friendship with James Joyce was tense and intermittent. Built up a large medical practice. Wrote lyrical poetry, and several plays attacking slum poverty. Supported the Free State during the Civil War, becoming a senator. Famously escaped from capture by Republican forces by swimming the Liffey. Republicans burned his house, Renvyle, in Connemarra. Wrote several works of (fictionalised) autobiography. Left for England in 1937 moving to America in 1939, where he wrote three novels.

As I was Going Down Sackville Street (1937) (London: Sphere Books, 1968)

Tumbling in the Hay (1939) (London: Sphere Books, 1982)

*Going Native** (1940)

Mad Grandeur (1940)

*Mr. Petunia** (1945)

Rolling Down the Lea (1950) (London: Sphere Books, 1982)

Bryan Walter Guinness (Lord Moyne)(1905-1992)

Born to the brewing family in Dublin. Educated at Eton and Oxford. A man of letters, he wrote plays, verse, short stories novels and a memoir.

Singing Out of Tune (1933)

Landscape with Figures (1934)

A Week by the Sea (1936)

The Story of Johnny and Jemima (1936)

A Fugue of Cinderellas (1956)

Leo and Rosabelle (1961)

The Giant's Eye (1964)

Father Joseph Guinan (1863-1932)

Born in Co. Offaly, educated and ordained at Maynooth, he worked in a Liverpool parish before returning to Ireland. In 1920 he became a Canon based at Dromod, Co. Longford. Most of his novels, written before Independence, have a strongly Catholic ethic and content. His last post-1922 novels are more politically motivated.

Annamore (1924)

The Patriots (1928)

Florence Hackett (1884-1963)

Born in Kilkenny, sister of Francis. Educated in Kilkenny and in Wales.

With the Benefit of the Clergy (1924)

Francis Hackett (1883-1962)

Born in Kilkenny, and educated at Clongowes Wood. A journalist, he emigrated to America, before moving to France and then returning to Ireland. When his Clongowes Wood-based novel *The Green Lion* (1936) was banned, he moved with his wife Signe Toksvig to her native Denmark. After another spell in America he returned to settle in Copenhagen. He wrote historical biographies, political treatises, social criticism as well as novels.

That Nice Young Couple (1925)

*The Green Lion** (1936)

The Senator's Last Night (1939)

William Hand (?)

Fair City (1946) (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1946)

Gerald Hanley (1916-1992)

Born in Cork (disputed-Liverpool?), a younger brother of James Hanley. Went to work in Africa aged 19, and then enlisted in the army in World War II. His *The Consul at Sunset* (1951), has been compared to Graham Greene. His novels have African and end-of-empire themes in which he introduces crises of conscience into novels of action.

Monsoon Victory (1946)

The Consul at Sunset (1951) (London: The Reprint Society, 1952)

The Year of the Lion (1953)

Drinkers of Darkness (1955)

Without Love (1957) (London: Mayflower-Dell, 1965)

The Journey Homeward (1961)

James Hanley (1901-1985)

Born in Dublin (disputed-Liverpool?) to an impoverished family. Novelist Gerald Hanley was his brother. Went to sea aged 13, serving in the Canadian navy during the war, and later as a merchant seaman. After a number of jobs became a journalist. Wrote nearly thirty novels, often seafaring dramas, but his best-received work was a series of novels centred on a Liverpool Irish family, the Furies. In addition he published sixteen volumes of short stories, six plays, many radio and television scripts, and seven other volumes of writings including an autobiography *Broken Water* (1937). Lived in Wales from 1931 before moving to London c1980.

Drift (1930)

*Ebb and Flood** (1932)

*Boy** (1931)

*The Furies** (1935)

*Stoker Bush** (1936)

The Secret Journey (1936)

Our Time is Gone (1940)

*No Directions** (1943)

The Ocean (1946) (London: William Kimber, 1976)

Winter Journey (1950)

The House in the Valley (1952)

Welsh Sonata (1954)

*Levine** (1956)

An End and a Beginning (1958)

Aidan Higgins (1927-2015)

Born in Celbridge, Co. Kildare. His first novel, *Langrishe, Go Down* (1966) was awarded the James Tait Memorial Prize, and was later adapted into a television play with screenplay by Harold Pinter. He spent periods of time abroad in Spain, South Africa, North and South Rhodesia, Germany and London, all recounted in three autobiographies. He has written several broadcast radio plays. On return to Ireland he lived in Kinsale, Co. Cork

Langrishe, Go Down (1966) (Dublin: New Island, 2007)

Pamela Hinkson (1900-1982)

Born in London, daughter of Katharine Tynan and educated privately in Ireland, Germany and France. The family had returned to Ireland when her father was appointed resident magistrate in Mayo. Following his death in 1919 the family returned to England. Worked as a journalist in London and for the British Ministry of Information in Europe, where she travelled widely; as she also did in America and India. Wrote mostly schoolgirl fiction; however other novels concern Big House families facing the changed circumstances in independent Ireland. She collaborated on the very successful autobiography of Lady Fingall, *Seventy Years Young* (1937).

The End of All Dreams (1923)

The Ladies Road (1932) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946)

The Deeply Rooted (1935)

The Light on Ireland (1935)

Indian Harvest (1941)

Golden Rose (1944)

The Lonely Bride (1951)

Norah Hoult (1898-1984)

Born in Dublin and educated in the north of England. After her parents early deaths, was sent to English boarding schools but spent much time with relations in Ireland. Worked mainly as a journalist in London, visiting Ireland 1931-1937 and America 1937-1939. Her collections of short stories deal with themes of prostitution, alcoholism, extreme poverty, insanity and unhappy marriages. Her novels – still relevant and insightful – reflect her liberal attitude in dealing with a sometimes bigoted Ireland. In retirement she settled in Greystones, Co, Wicklow.

*Time, Gentlemen, Time** (1927) (London: Heinemann, 1947)

Poor Women (1928) (London: The Scholartis Press, 1928)

Apartments to Let (1931)

Youth Can't Be Served (1933)

Holy Ireland (1935)

*Coming from the Fair** (1937)

*Nine Years is a Long Time** (1938)

*Four Women Grow Up** (1940)

*Smilin' on the Vine** (1941)

Augusta Steps Out (1942)

Scene for Death (1943)

*There were no Windows** (1944) (London: Heinemann, 1944)

*House under Mars** (1946)

*Selected Stories** (1946)

Farewell Happy Fields! (1948)

Frozen Ground (1952)

Sister Mavis (1953)

A Death Occurred (1954)

*Journey into Print** (1954)

Father Hone and the Television Set (1956)

Father and Daughter (1958)

Husband and Wife (1959)

The Last Days of Miss Jenkinson (1962)

Rosamond Jacob (1888-1960)

Born in Waterford to a family of Quakers. Her liberal attitudes to women's rights, Irish independence, religious freedom and animal rights were often in conflict with those of her contemporaries and those of a similar social class background. She lived in Dublin from 1920. A suffragette and member of Sinn Féin, she was active in the independence struggle, being imprisoned by the Free State government during the Civil War. Her short stories, novels and other writings resonate with her love of Irish life, culture, traditions and landscape.

The Troubled House (1937)

The Rebel's Wife (1957)

The Raven's Glen (1960)

Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967)

Born in Inniskeen, Co. Monaghan, son of a subsistence farmer/cobbler. Left school at thirteen, but then educated himself through reading. His talent for poetry was recognised by George Russell who published some poems in *The Irish Statesman* (1929-30). His commissioned autobiography, so fictionalised it should be considered a novel, *The Green Fool*, was published in 1938. Moved to Dublin in 1939. Wrote much lyrical poetry that swung between celebrating country life and condemning it. His friendships with Seán O'Faoláin, Frank O'Connor and Peadar O'Donnell helped

make him a critic of the independent Irish State, and also of the romanticism of the literary revivalists. His long poem *The Great Hunger* (1942) critiqued the life of the subsistence farmer, undermining De Valera's idealizing of the agricultural life, and the romanticising of the peasant life then popular with Irish poets and dramatists. Published his novel – another fictionalised autobiography – *Tarry Flynn* in 1948. Had to maintain himself through freelance journalism and literary criticism, in which, especially between mid-1940s to mid-1950s, he became increasingly embittered. He argued that literature should be responding to the ordinary and everyday in contemporary language and imagery. He opposed what he saw as an Irish preoccupation with heritage and tradition, and notions of Irishness and Irish exceptionalism. He celebrated the parochial and the individual personality, rather than the national and ethnicity.

The Green Fool (1938) (London: Penguin, 1975)

*Tarry Flynn** (1948) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978)

Katherine Keane (1904-1987)

Katherine Keane (née Boylan) was born and educated in Drogheda, Co. Louth. She wrote radio plays and two novels.

Who Goes Home? (1947)

So Ends My Dreams (1950)

Molly Keane (M.J.Farrell) (1904-1996)

Born in Co. Kildare to an Anglo-Irish family. Grew up in Co. Wexford and privately educated. Her mother, the poet Moira O'Neil, was reclusive and her father concentrated on the hunt. The five children were left in the impersonal care of governesses. She was just as unhappy when at fourteen, she was sent to the French school in Bray. The family home was burned down as reprisals for Black and Tan

atrocities. She claims she began writing either when confined to bed as a teenager, or elsewhere, for pin-money to supplement her dress allowance. Wrote her first novel in 1926, taking the pseudonym 'M.J.Farrell' from the name on a public house. Her fiction is typically set in the Big House environment of Anglo-Irish country society, with an emphasis on horses, racing and hunting. Her characters are usually romantic, marriageable and in conflict with their parents. Children are neglected in her novels – and they in their turn are cruel to their own children. The Anglo-Irish society is depicted in a fraught relationship with the new nation and its majority people. When her husband died leaving her with two young children, she stopped writing. After a gap of twenty years, she returned to novel-writing in the 1970s under her own name and with great success. Co-wrote a number of well-received plays for the London theatre with John Perry.

The Knight of the Cheerful Countenance (1926)

Young Entry (1928)

Taking Chances (1929)

Mad Puppetstown (1931) (London: Virago,1985)

Devoted Ladies (1934) (London: Virago, 1984)

Full House (1935)

The Rising Tide (1937) (London: Virago,1984)

*Two Days in Aragon** (1941)

Loving Without Tears (1951)

Treasure Hunt (1952)

Benedict Kiely (1919-2007)

Born in Dromore, Co. Tyrone. Educated in Omagh, at a novitiate at Emo, Co. Laois and at UCD. Worked as a journalist in Dublin (1945-1964), including some years as literary editor of the *Irish Press*, and then as a lecturer in American Universities and

at UCD. He wrote *Modern Irish Fiction* (1950) a positive review of contemporary writers. His early novels, set in the small-town life of his youth, explore personal relationships against the backdrop of political conflict in Ireland and elsewhere. His *There was an Ancient House* gives a vivid insight into the religious and community life of a seminary.

Land Without Stars (1946)

*In a Harbour Green** (1949)

Call for a Miracle (1950)

The Cards of the Gambler (1953) (Dublin: New Island, 2010)

*Honey Seems Bitter** (1954)

*There was an Ancient House** (1955) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1997)

The Captain with the Whiskers (1960) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1980)

Temple Lane (pseudonym of Mary Isabel Leslie) (1899-1978)

Born in Dublin, the daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman. Raised in Co. Limerick, she was educated in England before returning to earn a doctorate at Trinity College. A number of her poetry collections were published. Her novels often concern the development and maturity of young women in their relationships with Anglo-Irishmen. Her fiction also gave a realistic portrayal of the class of Catholic farmers who had acquired large holdings after the Land Wars and were highly influential in the new State. Her novel *The Little Wood* (1930) won the Tailteann Gold Medal. She also wrote 'lighter women's fiction' as Jean Herbert.

Burnt Bridges (1925)

Defiance (1926)

No Just Cause (1926)

Second Sight (1926)

Watch the Wall (1927)

The Bands of Orion (1928)

The Little Wood (1930)

Blind Wedding (1931)

Sinner Anthony (1933)

The Trains Go South (1938)

Battle of the Warrior (1940)

The House of My Pilgrimage (1941)

Friday's Well (1943)

Come Back! (1945) (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1945)

My Bonny's Away (1947)

Dorothy M. Large (1891- ?)

Born Dorothy Lumley in Tullamore, Co. Offaly. Educated at Dolgellau, North Wales and later at the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) School of Music, where she gained a Teacher's Certificate. Her novels concerned Anglo-Irish country life. Contributed stories to *The Irish Times*.

Cloonagh (1932)

The Kind Companions (1936)

Talk in the Townlands (1937)

Maura Laverty (1907-1966)

Born in Rathangan, Co. Kildare. Trained as a teacher at the Brigantine Convent, Tullow, Co. Carlow. In 1925 travelled to Spain to work as a governess. Her experiences there formed the basis of her novel *No More than Human*. After abandoning her governess role, she became secretary to Princess Bibesco, and then became a journalist for *El Debate*. She returned to Ireland in 1928, and continued working as a journalist. Her first novel *Never No More* was again fictionalised

autobiography in which she happily recalls her childhood brought up by her grandmother at Derrymore House. Her second novel *Alone We Embark* (1943) (re-titled *Touched By the Thorn* in America) was banned but still received the Irish Women Writers Award. She wrote children's books and television scripts, famously for the series *Tolka Row*. Her novel *Lift Up Your Gates* was dramatized into *Liffey Lane*. A noted broadcaster, and a noted cook, she produced several cookery books, including the wartime *Flour Economy* for the government, all based on her saying 'cooking with kindness'. Her recipes and love for food resonate through the novels.

Never No More (1942) (London: Virago, 1985)

*Alone We Embark** (1943) (USA : *Touched By the Thorn**) (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943)

No More Than Human (1944) (London: Virago, 1986)

*Lift Up Your Gates** (1946) (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946)

Green Orchard (1949)

Mary Lavin (1912-1996)

Born to Irish parents in Massachusetts. Returned to Ireland aged 10, where she lived for some time in Athenry, the setting for many of her stories as Castlerampart. Living in Dublin, she had a happy childhood – being an only child she was especially loved by her parents, and her mother's extended family. Mary was educated at the Loretto College, Leeson Street, Dublin and at UCD. On her marriage to William Walsh, they bought a farm in Meath while maintaining a small home in Dublin. Her first collection of stories, *Tales from Bective Bridge*, was published with a laudatory preface by Lord Dunsany and enjoyed critical success, and was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. She published a dozen more story collections, notable for her concentration on moments of personal insight rather than on

incident. Often her characters are depicted trying to preserve their humanity in facing an uncaring society. She is regarded as in the first rank of short-story authors. Her fiction received considerable recognition, and amongst several honours were the Katherine Mansfield Prize 1961, the Eire Society Gold Medal 1974, and the Gregory Medal 1975.

The House in Clewe Street (1945) (London: Virago, 1987)

Mary O'Grady (1950) (London: Virago, 1986)

Christine Longford (née Trew) (1900-1980)

Born in Somerset and educated at Somerville College, Oxford. Married Edward Pakenham, Lord Longford, in 1925 with whom she collaborated in the running of the Gate Theatre and Longford Productions. After her husband's death in 1961 she continued to run the Gate. Her novels concern the rather silly behaviour of upper class English and Anglo-Irish society. She adapted *Mr. Jiggins* for the stage, and wrote about twenty other plays.

Making Conversation (1931)

Country Places (1932)

Mr. Jiggins of Jigginstown (1933)

Printed Cotton (1935)

Sea Change (1940)

Patricia Lynch (1898-1972)

Born in Cork, she moved with the family to London on her father's death. She became active in the women's franchise movement. Sylvia Pankhurst asked her to

report the 1916 Rising. Her resultant pamphlet, *Rebel Ireland*, acknowledged to be a fair and accurate account, was sold widely in Europe and America. Her first story was published when she was only eleven, and she went on to write over fifty books, many of them children's books and many non-fiction. Her first novel, *The Cobbler's Apprentice* won the Tailteann Silver Medal for literature in 1932. In 1920 she married the writer R.M.Fox, moving to Dublin where she remained.

The Cobbler's Apprentice (1930)

Alexander McAllister (1877-1944)

Born in Dublin and educated at Clongowes Wood and the Royal University. Became chief secretary at National University Ireland (NUI) 1908-1914. Wrote two plays, *Irene Wycherly* (1906) and *At the Barn* (1912), that played successfully in London. Served in a machine-gun unit in World War One, being twice wounded. Settled in London but his later plays were all unsuccessful. Wrote a well-received detective story, *The Deductions of Colonel Gore* (1925), which began a series. Dorothy Sayers regarded him as one of the best detective story writers of the period. His *The Man on the Hill* was a study of society in time of war. (Also used the pseudonyms 'Anthony. P. Wharton' and 'Lynn Brock' and 'Henry Alexander').

The Man on the Hill (1923)

The Two of Diamonds (1926)

Dorothy Macardle (1899-1958)

Born in Dundalk, to a wealthy brewing family and educated at Alexandra College and UCD. Taught at Alexandra College until her arrest – in her classroom – for Republican activities in 1922. As well as some propaganda writing, she wrote *The Irish Republic* (1937), a noted and popular history of the War of Independence, as well as studies of Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. She wrote several plays. Her

collection of short stories *Earth-Bound* (1922) was written in prison. Her novels deal with women's lives and the influence of the supernatural on them.

The Seed was Kind (1940)

Uneasy Freehold (1942)

Fantastic Summer (1946)

Dark Enchantment (1953)

J[ohn] Bernard MacCarthy (1888-1979)

Born in Crosshaven, Co.Cork where he worked as a postman. He was a prolific writer of plays and short stories. His plays were popular with amateur companies, whilst several were successful at the Abbey Theatre. His themes often concerned ethical dilemmas in rural or seafaring life, involving a balance between personal gain and acting morally. His many short stories were often published, singly or in pairs, by the Catholic Truth Society (CTS). He wrote three rather melodramatic novels.

Covert (1925)

Possessions (1926)

Exile's Bread (1927)

John McGahern (1934-2006)

Born in Dublin, brought up in Cootehall, Co. Roscommon, where his father was the garda sergeant. Educated at Presentation College, Carrick-on-Shannon, St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra, and at UCD. Taught at St, John the Baptist National School, Clontarf, Co. Dublin. Enjoyed critical approval with his first novel *The Barracks* (1963). His second novel *The Dark* (1965) was banned under the Censorship of Publications Act. Following his dismissal from his teaching post, and the subsequent public outcry, he moved to London where he worked as a supply

teacher and on building sites. He later travelled widely, living for a while in both Spain and the United States of America. He returned to Co. Leitrim settling near Mohill, while travelling to teach in various universities. He wrote other well-received novels mainly centred on gardai, teachers and nurses in the West Midlands of Ireland, gaining for him the reputation as the leading Irish novelist of his generation. A play *The Power of Darkness* was produced at the Abbey Theatre. His collections of short stories are highly acclaimed.

The Barracks (1963) (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).

*The Dark** (1965) (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).

Patrick MacGill (1891-1963)

Born in Maas, Co. Donegal. Grew up in the Glenties, the basis for the 'Glenmornan' of his fiction. Eldest of eleven children, he was sent to the Strabane hiring fair when aged 12. At 14 he joined the potato-picking annual migration to Scotland. He then became an itinerant labourer, with work on the railways and on construction sites. These experiences are used in his novels, where the depictions of the hardships are made even more stark by the clarity of the narrative style. A verse collection was published at Derry in 1910, which brought him to the notice of a patron, Canon Dalton, who arranged a job for him at Windsor Castle library and to have another verse collection published. In 1913 he became a cub reporter with the *Daily Express* in London, but, not enjoying the work, he returned to Donegal. There his socialist and anti-clerical views attracted establishment anger. He had developed a working relationship with Herbert Jenkins a publisher renowned for his market-driven ethos which influenced all his novels. At the outbreak of war, MacGill saw action as a stretcher bearer with the London Irish Rifles. He was wounded at Loos. Contemporaries judged that his war-based novels, *The Amateur Army* (1915) *The Great Push: An Episode in the Great War* (1916), which documented the horrors endured by ordinary soldiers, delivered in a simple narrative style, were the most

authentic account of the war. In 1915, he married Margaret Gibbons, a niece of Cardinal Gibbons, and herself a writer of pulp fiction. He continued to write about the navvy life, the war and Irish rural life, but his work faded the further he grew from the actual lived experience. After it failed in London, he took a stage play *Suspense* (1920) to tour America. He settled there, never to return. His need to satisfy the non-Irish market led his later work into over-sentimentality and to stage-Irish caricature.

Lanty Hanlon (1922)

Moleskin Joe (1923)

The Carpenter of Orra (1924)

Black Bonar (1928)

The Glen of Carra (1934)

Helen Spenser (1937)

Walter Macken (1915-1967)

Born in Galway, where he was educated at the Patrician Brothers, and where he lived most of his life. Aged 17 he joined An Taibhdhearc, the Galway Irish-language theatre, had three years at the Abbey Theatre, before returning in 1939 as actor-manager, translator, and producer. He wrote successful plays in both Irish and English. The success of *Mungo's Mansion* when produced at the Abbey in 1946 established his reputation. When his third novel *Rain on the Wind* (1950) was a commercial success he was able to become a full-time writer. He also wrote collections of short stories. He returned to the Abbey in 1965 as assistant manager and artistic adviser.

*Quench the Moon** (1948)

*I Am Alone** (1949)

Rain on the Wind (1950)

*The Bogman** (1952)

Sunset on the Window Panes (1954)

Sullivan (1957)

Seek the Fair Land (1959)

The Silent People (1962) (London: Pan Books, 1965)

The Scorching Wind (1964) (London: Pan Books, 1964)

Michael McLaverty (1907-1992)

Born in Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan. Lived for a time on Rathlin Island, before being brought as a child to live in Belfast. Educated at St. Malachy's College, before graduating from Queen's University, Belfast. Was a primary school teacher 1929-1955, before becoming headteacher at a Catholic secondary school for boys, on the Falls Road, Belfast he retired in 1964. Developed a reputation for his short fiction in which his stories are unsentimental but compassionate, often concerned with the young and the dispossessed. His later work is concerned with the underlying tensions in Ulster rural life. In the late 1940s he decided to concentrate on Catholic novels dealing with good and evil, and how ordinary people encounter dilemmas in family and community life.

Call My Brother Back (1939) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1979)

Lost Fields (1942) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1980)

In This Thy Day (1945) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1981)

The Three Brothers (1948)

Truth in the Night (1951) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1986)

School for Hope (1954)

The Choice (1958)

The Brightening Day (1965)

E. MacLysaght (1887-1986)

Born near Bristol as Edward Anthony Edgeworth Lysaght, his father was Keeper of the Genealogy Office and himself a novelist. Educated at Bristol, Rugby and briefly at Corpus Christi, Oxford where his studies were interrupted by a rugby injury. Recuperated in Ireland in Co. Clare where he developed an interest in Irish. Studied for an MA at UCC, then worked a 600-acre farm bought for him by his father. Became a partner in the Maunsel Press. Imprisoned for supporting IRA activities during the War of Independence. Established the Irish Book Shop later made famous by P.S.O'Hegarty. Travelled to South Africa as a journalist. Active on Irish Manuscript Commissions, becoming Chief Genealogical Officer (1943-1954) and Keeper of Manuscripts at the National Library (1948-1954). He gave the title *Valley of the Squinting Windows* to Brinsley MacNamara's novel.

The Small Fields of Carrig (1929) (London: Heath Cranton, 1929)

Bryan MacMahon (1909-1998)

Born Listowel, Co. Kerry. Educated at St. Patrick's, Drumcondra. Became a national schoolteacher, and eventually headteacher at Listowel. Contributed poems and short stories to *The Bell*. His first story collection, reflecting his appreciation of rural life, *The Lion Tamer*, was published in 1948. Wrote two novels – *The Honey Spike* (1967) having been rewritten from a play, several collections of stories, some plays produced at the Abbey Theatre, and a translation of Peig Sayer's autobiography. Widely called 'the Master', he took that for the title of his autobiography.

Children of the Rainbow (1952) (Dublin: Butler Sims Publishing, 1983)

Francis MacManus(1909-1965)

Born in Kilkenny, educated at St. Patrick's Dublin and at UCD. Was a teacher for eighteen years before joining Radio Éireann in 1948. Wrote a first trilogy about penal

times, and then another set in modern rural Ireland. His novels and their themes reflect his Catholicism as central to the view of life of his characters. He remained conscious of the line between propaganda and art. He wrote two biographies and two books of political/social commentary about the emergence of the new state. Noted for his achievements at RTÉ, for example, inaugurating the Thomas Davis lecture series.

Stand and Give Challenge (1924) (Cork: Mercier, 1964)

Candle for the Proud (1936) (Cork: Mercier, 1964)

This House was Mine (1937) (Cork: Mercier, 1963)

Men Withering (1939) (Cork: Mercier, 1966)

Flow on Lonely River (1941) (Cork: Mercier, 1966)

Watergate (1942) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1980)

The Greatest of These (1943) (Cork: Mercier, 1963)

The Fire in the Dust (1950)

Statue for a Square

M[ichael] J. MacManus (1888-1951)

Born in Co. Leitrim and educated at London University. Taught in Lancashire 1907 before becoming a journalist in London. Returned to Ireland in 1916. From 1931 was the literary editor of *The Irish Press*. Wrote some historical works, and the official biography of Eamon de Valera 1944. Wrote two novels.

Green Jackdaw (1939)

Rackrent Hall (1941)

Seamus MacManus (?1870 - 1960)

Bold Blades of Donegal (1937)

Brinsley MacNamara (1890-1963)

Born John Weldon in Delvin, Co. Westmeath, one of seven children, he was son of the local schoolmaster, James Weldon. Joined the Abbey Theatre in 1909 as an actor, touring to America in 1911, and remaining there as a freelance until 1913, when he returned to Delvin to write his first novel. His depiction of real rural life, *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* (1918) debunked the popular idealisation; and resulted in the novel being publically burned in Delvin, a boycott of his father's school, and subsequent litigation. His father was forced to move away from the area. Brinsley subsequently lived in Quin, Co. Clare and Dublin. His disillusion with modern Ireland is reflected in the three novels he wrote in quick succession, *The Clanking of Chains* (1919), *In Clay and Bronze* (1920) (and published in England as *The Irishman* under the further pseudonym of 'Oliver Blyth) and *Mirror in the Dark* (1921). His first play was produced at the Abbey in 1919. He succeeded James Stephens as Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland 1924. He maintained a lifelong association with the Abbey Theatre, for whom he wrote several plays. For a short time he was a Director of the Abbey Theatre until resigning over the rejection of O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*. His later novels narrate examples of rural narrow-mindedness, with characteristic elements of fantasy and exaggeration. He also wrote collections of short stories and a novella *The Whole Story of the X.Y.Z.* (1951).

Look at the Heffernans (1926)

The Various Lives of Marcus Igoe (1929) (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1996)

Return to Ebontheever (1930) {reissued as *Othello's Daughter* 1942}

Margaret Gillan (1934)

Michael Caravan (1946) (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1946)

The Whole Story of X.Y.Z. (1951)

Janet McNeill (1907-1994)

Born in Dublin, moved with her family to Birkenhead in 1913, where she was educated. Awarded MA at St. Andrews University, where she became involved in acting and in writing plays. Her father's ill-health caused the family to return to Ireland where she worked for *The Belfast Telegraph*. She married in 1933 and settled in Lisburn. She wrote twenty-four popular books for children, twelve novels, many plays and short stories, two opera libretti for children, and much journalism. Her novels are mainly concerned with the stresses generated in upper-middle-class society.

A Child in the House (1955)

Tea at Four O'Clock (1956)

The Other Side of the Wall (1956)

A Finished Room (1958)

Search Party (1957)

As Strangers Here (1960)

The Early Harvest (1962)

Ethel Mannin (1900-1984)

Born in London to Irish parents, kept a home in Connemara for some years. A prolific writer (approximately 100 published books) about half of which are fiction. Her early novels explored the lives of working class women. Later themes included anarchism and pacifism. *Late Have I Loved Thee* (1948) was a successful best-seller in Ireland, narrating the conversion to Catholicism of an Englishman, who finally becomes a Jesuit. She wrote several autobiographies, and a noted reminiscence *Connemara Journal* (1947) which includes her friendship with W.B. Yeats in his later years; and a literary study of Gerald Griffin and Francis Mahony *Two Studies in*

Integrity 1954. She was instrumental in securing Francis Stuart's release from custody.

Green Willow (1928)

Crescendo (1929)

Green Figs (1931)

Children of the Earth (1937)

Sounding Brass (1937)

Ragged Banner (1938)

Cactus (1941)

Red Rose (1942)

Captain Moonlight (1942)

Castles in the Street (1942)

The Blossoming Bough (1943)

The Dark Forest (1947)

Late Have I Loved Thee (1948) (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1948)

Every Man a Stranger (1950)

Lover Under Another Name (1954)

So Tiberius (1954)

The Living Lotus (1956)

Fragrance of Hyacinths (1958)

Curfew at Dawn (1962)

Mary Manning (1906-1999)

Born in Dublin and educated at Morehampton House School and Alexandra College, Dublin. She studied art in London and Boston, and acting at the Abbey Theatre school in Dublin. Acted with the Irish Players in London, and then with the Abbey and later the Gate theatre in Dublin, where she edited *Motley* the Gate's magazine

which attracted contributions from many writers of the day. Had a brief affair, and then maintained a long correspondence with Samuel Beckett.. She married and moved to Boston, where she raised her family, returning to Ireland after the death of her husband in 1967. She wrote plays for the Gate, with her first *Youth's the Season ?* (1936) being particularly successful. Her other plays include successful adaptations of *Finnegan's Wake* and O'Connor's *The Saint and Mary Kate*. She wrote two novels depicting middle-class Dublin society, a volume of short stories, and theatre criticism. She returned to Boston on her re-marriage to Faneuil Adams in 1980.

Mount Venus (1938)

Lovely People (1953)

Florence Norah Millar (1920- ?)

Born in Co. Dublin, she was educated in Dublin and in England. She studied music at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She wrote novels, short stories and plays.

Fishing is Dangerous (1946)

Grant's Overture (1946)

The Lone Kiwi (1948)

Brian Moore (1921-1999)

Born in Belfast into a Catholic family. His father was a doctor. Educated at St. Malachy's College. Joined the Air Raid Precautions Unit in 1941, and then in 1943 the Ministry of War Transport, posted to North Africa and then at the ports of Naples and Marseilles. At the end of the war, he worked with the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Warsaw. Emigrated to Canada in 1948, taking Canadian citizenship in 1953. He worked as a proof-reader and reporter. Married Jacqueline Sirois in 1951. Moved to the USA in 1959 living in Long Island, New York

and Malibu, where he lived with his second wife, Jean Denney whom he married in 1967. Wrote short stories and film scripts as well as novels.

*A Wreath for a Redhead** (1951)

*The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne** (1955)(St. Albans: Granada Publishing, 1965)

The Colour of Blood (1957)

The Feast of Lupercal (1958)

The Luck of Ginger Coffey (1960)

*An Answer from Limbo** (1962)

The Emperor of Ice Cream (1965)

Val[entine] Mulholland (1925-)

Born and educated in Dublin. Her first short stories were published in *The Bell* in the early 1950s, when she was associate editor. Her two early novels are not considered as well-written as her later novels written after a twenty-year gap. A member of the Irish Academy of Letters.

A Time Outworn (1951)

A Peacock Cry (1954)

Edna O'Brien (1930-)

Born in Tuamgraney, Co. Clare, and educated at Scariff, Co. Clare, in Loughrea, Co. Galway, and the Pharmaceutical College in Dublin where she subsequently worked for a short time as a pharmacist. In 1951 she married Ernest Gébler, moving to London in 1959. She divorced in 1967. Her first three novels, socially and psychologically realistic, caused a literary sensation, dealing as they did with a young woman's coming to maturity, and therefore to sexual desire, in the Ireland of the late 1950s. All three were banned under the censorship regime. These, and her

later novels deal with relationships and love affairs from the viewpoint of a female, who tends to suffer badly at the hands of the males. She claims that her first novels portrayed the bleakness of her early life, especially at convent school, but emphasises that the narrative is not true. Similarly her characters are influenced by her experiences but are imaginative re-inventions. She wrote several well-received collections of short stories, as well as plays and screenplays of her own fictions, and also *Mother Ireland* a commentary and travelogue.

*The Country Girls** (1962) *The Lonely Girl** (1964) *Girls in their Married Bliss** (1964).

The Country Girls Trilogy (London: Penguin, 1988).

Kate O'Brien (1897-1974)

Born in 1897 in Limerick (her fictional Mellick), Kate had nine siblings. Her mother died when she was five years old, consequently she and three sisters were boarded at Laurel Hill Convent, Kate for thirteen years. She won a scholarship to University College Dublin graduating in 1919. She moved to England in 1920 working briefly as a journalist and as a teacher, before accompanying her brother-in-law, Stephen O'Mara, on a fundraising tour to the United States of America for the Irish Free State. Subsequently, Kate spent ten months as a governess in Spain. Returning to England, she married a Dutch journalist, Gustaff Renier. The marriage lasted less than a year. She wrote four plays of which one, *Distinguished Villa*, was a critical and commercial success. Her first novel, *Without My Cloak* (1931), was awarded The Hawthornden Prize and The James Tait Memorial Prize. Whilst writing novels, she also wrote literary reviews for *The Spectator* (1937-1952), and a column for *The Irish Times* (1967-1971). Two of her nine novels were banned under the Censorship Act: *Mary Lavelle* (1936) and *Land of Spices* (1941). She was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters, and to the Royal Society of Literature. Whilst mainly living in London, Kate

did return to Roundstone, Co. Galway for a ten year period. She died in Kent in 1974.

Without My Cloak (1931) (London: Virago, 2001)

The Ante Room (1933) (London: Virago, 1988)

*Mary Lavelle** (1936) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951)

Pray for the Wanderer (1938) (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1951)

*The Land of Spices** (1941) (London: Virago, 2000)

The Last of Summer (1943) (London: Virago, 1990)

That Lady (1946) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)

The Flower of May (1953) (London: The Companion Book Club, 1955)

As Music and Splendour (1958) (London: Penguin, 2005)

Frank O'Connor (1903-1966)

Frank O'Connor (pseudonym of Michael O'Donovan). Born in Cork in relative poverty, and brought up by his doting mother while his father, a British soldier, was absent on service. His father's dramatic home visits appear regularly in O'Connor's stories and reminiscences, as does his mother Minnie in the mother-son relationships. His formal education ended at 12, but, with the encouragement of Daniel Corkery, he read widely. During the Civil War he took the republican side and was interned in Gormanstown in 1923. His experiences of the romantic idealism of the struggle for independence, coupled with the brutality of guerrilla warfare informed his first short story collection *Guest of the Nation* (1931). He felt his experiences were a betrayal of his revolutionary ideals, and this fed his disillusion with the realities of the Irish Free State. On release he became a librarian and an active member of the Dublin literary scene, contributing to George Russell's *The Irish Statesman*, and co-founding with W.B. Yeats the Irish Academy of Letters. He wrote poetry collections, translated poetry from Irish, wrote plays performed at the Abbey

Theatre as well as further short story collections and two novels. He served as a director of the Abbey Theatre 1935-1939. He married a Welsh actress Evelyn Bowen, and settled in Co. Wicklow to be a full-time writer. He wrote scripts and made broadcasts for Radio Éireann, which confirmed him in his belief that his work 'should ring with the sound of a man's voice speaking.' Some of his work was banned under the Censorship of Publications Act, notably his novel *Dutch Interior* (1940) and his translation of Brian Merriman's *The Midnight Court* (1945). Two collections of short stories were banned, *The Common Chord* (1947) and *Traveller's Samples* (1951), the latter having been earlier published in *The New Yorker*. His short fiction, which he regularly re-worked and re-published, was highly regarded. In 1951, with his marriage broken-down, he moved to America to lecture at various Colleges where he was regarded as a brilliant teacher. This work led to three notable works of literary criticism, *The Mirror on the Roadway* (1956), *The Lonely Voice* (1962), and *The Backward Look* (1967). He returned to Ireland in 1960.

The Saint and Mary Kate (1932) (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990)

*Dutch Interior** (1940) (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990)

John O'Connor (1920-1960)

Born Drumcain, Co. Armagh. Went to work at 14. Wrote stories for *The Bell*, *Argosy* and *Chamber's Journal*. His novel gives insight into the Ulster Catholic experience.

Come Day – Go Day (1948) (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1948)

Peadar O'Donnell (1893-1986)

Born in Meenmore, Dungloe, County Donegal in 1893; an impoverished rural area. His experience of the hardships endured in seasonal potato-picking in Scotland helped stir his life-long commitment to improving conditions for working people, and re-affirmed his socialist political philosophy. Educated at St. Patrick's Teacher

Training College, he taught for a short time, before becoming a full-time union organiser. A republican commander during the War of Independence, and the Civil War. Imprisoned in Mountjoy Gaol for two years after the Civil War and held as a hostage against assassinations. Later, he continued as a union/political organiser, writing whenever possible. He edited *An tOglach*, and *An Phoblacht*, the IRA paper, from its foundation to its suppression 1925-1931. He left the IRA and formed the Republican Congress. Organised Irish volunteers to fight against Franco in Spain, activities he described in *Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (1937). A co-founder and managing director of *The Bell*, he became editor in 1946.

The Storm (1926) (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1926)

Islanders (1927) (Cork: Mercier, 1988)

Adrigool (1929) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929)

The Knife (1930) (Dublin: Irish Humanities Centre, 1980)

On the Edge of the Stream (1934) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934)

The Big Windows (1955) (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1955)

Eimar O'Duffy (1893-1935)

Born in Dublin, where his father was a fashionable dentist. Educated at Stonyhurst and at UCD where he graduated in dentistry but never practised. Wrote some plays for Edward Martin's Irish Theatre 1914-1916. Joined the Irish republican Brotherhood and the Irish Volunteers. In March 1916, together with Bulmer Hobson, he brought news of the impending Easter Rising to Eoin MacNeil, who then sent him to Belfast to call off the insurrection there. He used these days in his first novel *The Wasted Island* 1919 (revised 1929) depicting key figures such as Patrick Pearse and Roger Casement. He wrote two light-hearted realistic novels, *Printer's Errors* (1922) and *Miss Rudd and Some Lovers* (1923). During 1922-1923 he edited , and contributed articles to, *The Irish Review*. He married in 1922 and worked at the Department of External Affairs, before losing the job. In 1925, he moved to London working as a

journalist and writer. He was Paris correspondent for an American newspaper for a period, and also worked as a publicity agent for the Liberal Party. Ill health and financial worries led to three potboiling detective novels, before writing his Cuanduine trilogy of economic satires. His mock-heroic use of Irish mythology in the trilogy pre-dates Flann O'Brien's similar style in *At Swim-two-Birds*. The trilogy is anti-capitalist in attitude, reflecting O'Duffy's disillusion with the bourgeois state he considered Ireland had become.

The Wasted Island (1919)

The Lion and the Fox (1922)

Printer's Errors (1922)

Miss Rudd and Some Lovers (1923)

King Goshawk and the Birds (1926) (London: MacMillan & Co.,1926)

The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street (1928) (London: MacMillan & Co., 1928)

The Secret Enemy (1932)

The Bird Cage (1932)

Asses in Clover (1933) (Charlbury: Jon Carpenter Books,2003)

Heart of a Girl (1935)

Seán O'Faoláin (1900-1991)

Born John Whelan in Cork to a family recently moved into the city from the country. Father was a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary, while his mother ran a boarding house that mainly catered for artists performing at the nearby Opera House. Educated at the Presentation Brothers, he was particularly influenced by Daniel Corkery in studying literature and Irish culture. Entered University College Cork (UCC) in 1918 to study English, Irish and Italian. There joined the Irish Volunteers. A keen member of the Gaelic League often visited the West Cork Gaeltacht with Frank O'Connor, where he met his future wife Eileen Gould, who

was to become a distinguished writer of children's stories. His autobiography, *Vive Moi !* (1963), narrates how his interest in Irish nationalism was developed, including his taking of the anti-treaty Republican side in the Civil War during which he was director of propaganda for the First Southern Division of the IRA. He became disillusioned when realising that the irregulars lacked the vision to create the Ireland that they, and he, espoused. He returned to study at UCC, then, in 1926, moved to Harvard on a Commonwealth Scholarship, achieving an MA in English Literature. He married Eileen in Boston in 1928, before teaching English at Boston College and then returning to England in 1929. Taught at Strawberry Hill Training College in Twickenham (1929-1933). In 1933, on the advice of Edward Garnett, he returned to Ireland to concentrate on writing. His early fictions were short story collections that reflect his early enthusiasm for, and his later disillusion with, the nationalist struggle. He wrote a series of historical novels set from the Fenian Rising through to the early Free State years, that examined the internal conflict of idealistic volunteers faced with the deadening reality that he considered had emerged. He wrote a series of acclaimed biographies; *Constance Markievicz* (1934), *The King of the Beggars* (1938), and *The Great O'Neill* (1942). He wrote two biographies of *Eamon de Valera* – the first (1933) very positive, the latter (1939) very critical, recording O'Faoláin's disappointment with Ireland as he saw it. His social criticism was revealed in his *Newman's Way* (1952) and *The Irish* (1948), and in many articles in journals and newspapers. Between 1940 and 1946, he edited *The Bell* a literary journal he founded with Peadar O'Donnell. The journal encouraged and published most of the writers of the day, mixing literature and literary criticism with some bitter political criticism of Ireland's religious and social attitudes, which he considered to be anti-intellectual and authoritarian. He criticised the promotion of visions of a Celtic past, and of false portrayals of Ireland's traditional culture and exclusiveness, and argued for an international perspective. His ability to effectively communicate his criticisms made him one of the leading voices of opposition to the State and the Catholic Church. He wrote two major works of literary criticism, *The Short Story* (1948) and *The Vanishing*

Hero (1956), as well as travel books of Italy and Ireland, mixing description with comment. His reputation as an articulate chronicler of newly-independent Ireland has remained, and while his novels have been somewhat downgraded by literary critics, he is regarded as one of the most able of all short story writers.

A Nest of Simple Folk (1934) (New York: Carol Publishing, 1990)

*Bird Alone** (1936) (Dublin: Millington, 1973)

Come Back to Erin (1940) (London: Cape, 1940)

Liam O'Flaherty (1896-1984)

Born at Gort na gCapall on Inis Mór, largest of the Aran Islands, within a large family and a close-knit community, where both Irish and English were spoken. He won scholarships to Rockwell College, County Tipperary in 1908, possibly with the intention of becoming a priest, and to Blackrock College in 1913 and Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, in 1914 – the same year he was awarded a scholarship to University College, Dublin. He left University to join the British army's Irish Guards, fighting in World War One from 1915 until wounded in 1917 at Langemark. He was left with melancholia acuta, the after-effects of shell-shock. His somewhat fictionalised autobiography *Two Years* (1930) records his work and travels between 1918 and 1921 in London, South America, Turkey, Canada and the United States. In 1922, he was involved in a brief workers occupation of the Rotunda in Dublin. Soon after, he left for London intending to become a writer. He met Edward Garnett, a reader for Jonathan Cape, and an important mentor for Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence, who undertook the same role for O'Flaherty. Under Garnett's guidance to write about what he knew best, O'Flaherty returned to Inis Mór where he began to write the short stories about animals and island people that made his literary reputation. In 1926 he married the writer Margaret Barrington, separating in 1932. He lived in various places in Ireland and in England during the 1920s, before spending several years in Connecticut beginning in the 1930s. There he met his long-

term companion Catherine Taler, the 'Kitty' of many of his letters. He returned to Dublin, where he was to remain, in 1946. He wrote other boisterous, but factually unreliable, autobiographies *I Went to Russia* (1931) and *Shame the Devil* (1934), a literary study of Conrad, a biography of Tim Healy, a fantasy *The Ecstasy of Aengus* (1931), the satiric *A Tourist's Guide to Ireland* (1929), and *A Cure for Unemployment* (1931). He wrote several novels of real quality, others that were somewhat weaker, and wrote over 150 short stories.

Thy Neighbours Wife (1923) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1992)

The Black Soul (1924) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928)

The Informer (1925) (London: NEL Books, 1958)

Mr. Gilhooley (1926) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1991)

The Wilderness (1927) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1986)

The Assassin (1928) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1983)

*The House of Gold** (1929) (Nuascealta, 2013)

The Return of the Brute (1929) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1998)

Skerrett (1932) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1993))

*The Puritan** (1932) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 2001)

*Shame the Devil** (1934) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1981).

*The Martyr** (1935) (London: Victor Gollanz, 1933)

*Hollywood Cemetery** (1935)

Famine (1937) (Dublin: Wolfhound, 2002)

*Land** (1946) (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946)

Con O'Leary (1887-1958)

Born in Cork, he wrote plays for the Abbey Theatre, a number of books including *Wayfarer in Ireland* (1935). He died in London.

*A Hillside Man** (1933)

Passage West (1945)

Margaret O'Leary (?)

A playwright and novelist whose work was much admired by W.B.Yeats. Wrote several plays performed at the Abbey Theatre, and some novels.

The House I Made (1935)

Lightning Flash (1939)

Joseph O'Neill (1878-1953)

Born in Tuam, Co. Galway, he spent much of his childhood on the Aran Islands where his father was a policeman. He was educated at University College Galway (UCG), also attending Maynooth briefly, leaving when he ceased to believe in God. He gave up a lectureship at UCG in 1903 to study Irish under Kuno Meyer and going on to study philology in Manchester and Freiberg. In 1908 he joined the Civil Service. His first literary work was a verse play *The Kingdom-Maker* (1917). His novels reflect his interest in the psychological theories of Jung and Freud, especially concerning the unconscious. Seeking commercial success, his style turned to popular historical romance and science fiction, with some exploration of nationalist history and culture, Catholicism and son-father relationships. He was Permanent Secretary for Education 1923-1944, retiring to write. Moved briefly to France in 1949, returning in poor health to Co, Wicklow.

Wind from the North (1934)

Land Under England (1935) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)

Day of Wrath (1936)

Philip (1940)

Chosen by the Queen (1947)

The Black Shore (unpublished)

Conal O’Riordan (pseudonym: Norreys Connell) (1891-1947)

Born Dublin, son of a QC. Educated at Clongowes Wood and Belvedere. Injured spine in a riding accident. Wrote plays for the Abbey, and was an actor and on the Board there. Wrote some series of novels including the "Soldier" and the "Adam" series.

Married Life (1924)

Soldier Born (1927)

Soldier of Waterloo (1928)

Soldier's Wife (1935)

Soldier's End (1938)

Judith Quinn (1939)

Sheila Pim (1909-1996)

Born in Dublin and educated in Dublin, Lausanne and Cambridge. A prolific writer, mainly of detective stories and books with a gardening interest.

The Flowering Shamrock (1949)

Other People's Business (1957)

The Sheltered Garden (1964)

John Pollock (pseudonym: An Philibín) (1887-1964)

Born in Dublin. Educated at the Royal University, he practiced medicine as a pathologist, except for a brief period in which he entered a monastery. In 1928 he was a founding member of the Gate Theatre. As well as his novels he wrote some

unpublished plays, poetry, two short story collections *Smoking Flax* (1922) and *Irish Ironies* (1930), and a study of W.B. Yeats (1935).

The Valley of the Wild Swans (1932)

Peter and Paul (1933) (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1933)

The Moth and the Star (1937)

Mount Kestrel (1945)

The Last Nightingale (1951)

Patrick Purcell (1914- ?)

Born in Co. Kilkenny. Educated at St. Kieran's, Kilkenny and UCD. He became a sports journalist working in Dublin. Regarded as an expert on the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) about which he published *Sixty Glorious Years* (1945) and *The Guinness Book of Hurling Records* (1965). His novels were popular with Irish-Catholic America; and have been translated into Dutch and German. His novel *The Quiet Man* should not be confused with Maurice Walsh's short story which is the basis of the well-known film of that title.

Hanrahan's Daughter (1942)

A Keeper of Swans (1944) (Dublin: Talbot, 1944)

The Quiet Man (1945) (Dublin: Talbot, 1945)

Fiddler's Green (1949)

Olivia Robertson (1917-2013)

Born in London, she attended school in Ascot before the Alexandra College in Dublin. She then studied at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London and at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin. Her novels and short stories are set in Ireland. They contain a mix of the everyday, ancient times and myths, and the mysterious. Her interest in the occult – demonstrated in the novels by pagan altars,

fairies and the like – led her to co-found with her brother the fellowship of Isis, which they based at a castle near Enniscorthy. She herself became a priestess. As well as novels she wrote about Dublin and about Isis.

Field of the Stranger (1948)

The Golden Eye (1949)

Miranda Speaks (1950)

Philip Rooney (1907-1962)

Born in Co. Sligo he was educated in Limerick. Worked as a bank clerk around the Irish midlands for 15 years, during which he wrote short stories including one *Irish Fortune* which won first prize in a Hospital Sweepstake competition. Ill-health caused him to retire from banking, and thereafter he worked as a journalist, novelist and as a scriptwriter for radio and television.

All Out to Win (1935)

Red Sky at Dawn (1939)

North Road (1940) (Dublin: Talbot, 1940)

Singing River (1944) (Dublin: Talbot, 1944)

Captain Boycott (1946)

The Golden Coast (1947)

The Long Day (1951)

John D. Sheridan (1903-1980)

Born in Dublin, he was a very popular humourist and novelist. He published a large number of essays and sketches, including *I Laugh to Think* (1946), and poetry *Joe's No Saint* (1949), and short stories, as well as his novels

Vanishing Spring (1934)

Here's Their Memory (1941)

Paradise Alley (1945) (Dublin: Seven Towers, 2012)

The Magnificent McDarney (1949)

The Rest is Silence (1953) (Dublin: Talbot, 1953)

God Made Little Apples (1962)

Kenneth Reddin Shiels (pseudonym: Kenneth Sarr) (1895-1967)

Born in Dublin, and educated at Belvedere, Clongowes, and St Enda's under Patrick Pearse, and then UCD. He was imprisoned for republican activities. After independence he became a District Justice aged only 27. He remained on the Bench for over 37 years. He wrote a number of plays for the Abbey Theatre, one of which, *The Passing* (1924), won the Gold Medal at the Tailteann Games. He also wrote two children's books and three novels set in the revolutionary period.

The White Bolle-Trie (1927)

Somewhere to the Sea (1936)

Another Shore (1945)(USA: Young Man with a Dream 1946)

Paul Smith (1935-1997)

Born in Dublin, he travelled widely in Europe and America. His first novels is set in the tenements of Dublin during the Easter Rising, his second in the Civil War. *Stravaganza* 1963 is a satire of west of Ireland culture.

Esther's Altar (1959) (Reissued as *Come Trailing Blood* 1977)(London:Quartet,1977)

The Stubborn Season (1961)

The Countrywoman (1962) (London: Picador, 1987)

Stravaganza (1963)

Annie M.P. Smithson (1873-1948)

Born into a middle-class family in Sandymount, Dublin, her mother, following Annie's father's early death, remarried to a factory owner at Warrington, Lancashire. Annie strongly disliked her stepfather. Annie converted to both Catholicism and to Republicanism in 1907 on learning that her father had been a Fenian. She trained as a nurse in London and Edinburgh, returning to Dublin in 1900. She practised in Millton, Co. Down 1901-1906, where she had a loving relationship with a married doctor, Dr. James Manton, which eventually proved too painful. She returned as a district nurse and settled in Dublin. In the 1918 General Election campaigned for Sinn Féin. During the Civil War she gave first aid training to Cumann na mBan members, and herself nursed combatants in the siege at Moran's Hotel. She was imprisoned by Free State forces at Mullingar prison from where she was rescued by Linda Kearns MacWhinney and Muriel MacSwinney, who posed as a Red Cross delegation. She did much of her nursing in the Dublin tenements. In 1929 she became Secretary of the Irish Nurses' Organisation, a post she held up to 1942. She contributed articles to the *Evening Mail* and the *Irish Nurses' Magazine*. She also edited the *Irish Nurses' Union Gazette*. Elements of her personal experiences – including a painful and long-lasting involvement with a married doctor – occur throughout her highly-popular novels. Her novels are romances, regularly involving engagements or marriages between Catholics and Protestants and often ending with a conversion to Catholicism. Her republicanism and loyalty to Ireland are regular themes. She also uses the fading glories of middle-class Anglo-Irish society. Her female heroes are strong characters – strong-willed and idealistic and feminine. She also wrote an autobiography *Myself – and Others* (1944), and two short story collections.

Her Irish Heritage (1917) (Cork: Mercier Press, 1988)

By Strange Paths (1919)

Carmen Cavanagh (1921)

The Walk of a Queen (1922)

The Laughter of Sorrow (1925)

Norah Connor (1925) (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1925)

These Things (1927)

Sheila of the O'Beirnes (1929)

Traveller's Joy (1930)

The Light of Other Days (1933)

For God and Ireland (1931)

Leaves of Myrtle (1932)

The Marriage of Nurse Harding (1935) (Cork: Mercier Press, 1989)

The White Owl (1937)

Wicklow Heather (1938)

Margaret of Fair Hill (1939)

The Weldens of Tibradden (1940) (Cork: Mercier Press, 1988)

By Shadowed Ways (1943)

Tangled Threads (1943)

The Village Mystery (1945)

Paid in Full (1946) (Cork: Mercier Press, 1990)

Edith Oenone Somerville(1858-1949)

Born on Corfu (where her father was stationed) she grew up at Drishane House, her family's home in Castletownshend, Co. Cork, the eldest of eight children. Educated by governesses and briefly at Alexandra College, Dublin. Studied painting for a term at Kensington School of Art, and at Dusseldorf in 1882, before studying under Colarossi in Paris in 1884 and 1886. In 1886 at home in Castletownshend she met her cousin Violet Martin (pseudonym Martin Ross) with whom she formed the literary partnership of Somerville and Ross. Together they wrote five novels and three

volumes of the "R.M." (Resident Magistrate) stories. After Violet Martin's death in 1915, Somerville continued writing under joint names on the grounds she believed that Violet's spirit was supporting her. Somerville wrote five more novels, and several books of reminiscences, including an account of her successful lecture tour in the USA in 1929. She received a D.Litt from Trinity College in 1932, and was invited by Yeats to join the Irish Academy of Letters, which awarded her the Gregory Gold Medal in 1941. An accomplished artist and illustrator. She was a keen horsewoman, training and trading horses and becoming Master of the Carbery Hunt. She took an active part in managing the family estate.

The Big House at Inver (1925) (London: Quartet, 1978)

French Leave (1928) (London: Sphere Books, 1987)

Sarah's Youth (1938)

Leonard Alfred George Strong (1896-1958)

Born in Plymouth to Irish parents, who often brought him to Ireland as a child. He maintained a life-long interest in Irish dialects and in the West of Ireland. He was educated at Brighton and Oxford. He joined the BBC as a broadcaster. He wrote several books of verse, including *Dublin Days* (1931), and several collections of short stories. In addition to his many novels he also wrote, literary criticism, local history, biography and an autobiography *Green Memory* (1961).

*The Bay** (1931)

Sea Wall (1933)

The Director (1944)

*The Hill of Howth** (1953)

The Light Above the Lake (1958)

Francis Stuart (1902-2000)

Born in Australia to Ulster parents. After his father's suicide, the infant Francis was brought back to Co. Antrim. Educated at Rugby School. In 1920 he married Iseult Gonne. Took part in the Civil War on the Republican side. Captured while carrying out an ambush in August 1922, and imprisoned at Maryborough and the Curragh until released in November 1923. Published privately a small collection of poems which was praised by Yeats. Studied mysticism which was to provide an intellectual basis for his novels, which explore the blending of the physical and the spiritual, and showing a disillusion with Ireland where commercialism had driven out the mysticism of the past. His heroes are non-conforming individuals sacrificing themselves for their ideals. He also wrote a play *Men Crowd Round Me* performed at the Abbey. In 1939 faced with marital and financial problems and despite the outbreak of war, he accepted a lectureship at Berlin University's Englische Seminar, aware of the hostility this would provoke. Between 1942-1944 he broadcast weekly talks about literature and Irish politics from wartime Germany to Ireland. Shortly after the war ended, French forces arrested Stuart and his companion Gertrud Meissner, whom he married in 1954 following Iseult's death. Released in July 1946, they remained in Freiburg until 1949 in near-starvation conditions. During this period he wrote a trilogy of novels, *The Pillar of Cloud* (1948), *Redemption* (1949) and *The Flowering Cross* (1950). These haunting novels reflect the impact of war and dreadful sufferings, but also how individuals can learn from painful experience to a spiritual understanding. He moved to London in 1954, and wrote five more novels. Returning to Ireland in 1958 he began to work on *Black List, Section H* his 'memoir in fictional form.' The success of this stimulated Stuart to further novel writing in a more experimental but still mystical form. These novels led in the 1980s and 1990s to wide critical acclaim and to firmly establish his literary reputation.

Women and God (1931)

Pigeon Irish (1932)

The Coloured Dome (1932)

Try the Sky (1933)

Glory (1933)

In Search of Love (1935)

The Angel of Pity (1935)

The White Hare (1936)

The Bridge (1937)

*Julie** (1938)

The Great Squire (1939)

The Pillar of Cloud (1948)

*Redemption** (1949) (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994)

*The Flowering Cross** (1950)

*Good Friday's Daughter** (1952)

*The Chariot** (1953)

*The Pilgrimage** (1955)

Victors and Vanquished (1958)

The Angels of Providence (1959)

Honor Tracy (1913-1987)

English-born journalist who moved to Ireland after World War II. She wrote satirical fiction, essays and journalism, including assisting on *The Bell* then edited by Sean O'Faolain, with whom she had an affair. Her numerous novels give a comical account of Irish rural life.

The Straight and Narrow Path (1958) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960)

The Prospects are Pleasing (1958)

William Trevor (Cox) (1928-)

Born into a Protestant family in Middleton, Co.Cork. With his father a bank official, he was educated in numerous schools in a variety of towns before attending St. Columba's College and then Trinity College Dublin from where he graduated with a history degree. He taught in both Ireland and England before a successful period as a sculptor. His second novel *The Old Boys* (1964) won the Hawthornden Prize. His novels and short stories often depict eccentrics, or the marginalised, interacting with a staid society and causing often amusing disruption. His wry humour avoids any lasting gloominess. He wrote many acclaimed short stories, which, like his novels, are set with equal assurance in either Ireland or England, where he lived – in Devon – since the 1960s. He also wrote drama, a children's book, non-fiction works, and edited *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* (1989).

A Standard of Behaviour (1958) (London: Abacus, 1982)

The Old Boys (1964)

The Boarding House (1965)

Una Troy (pseudonym: Elizabeth Connor until late 1940s) (1918-1993)

Born in Fermoy, Co.Cork, the daughter of a judge. She was educated at Loreto Convent, Dublin. Her first two novels, and four plays for the Abbey were published under the pseudonym 'Elizabeth Connor'. Her first novel *Mount Prospect* (1936) was banned under censorship, but adapted as a play and, performed at the Abbey in 1940, it gained the Shaw Prize for new playwrights. Her second novel - though not banned - drew clerical condemnation. Her subsequent fourteen novels were published under her own name. *We Are Seven* (1955) is a humorous and sympathetic depiction of a family in which each of the seven children of an unmarried mother have a different father. Adapted as a film – with Troy as co-screenwriter – and entitled *She Didn't Say No!* 1958 – it was not shown in Dublin until 2001.

*Mount Prospect** (1936)

Dead Star's Light (1938)

The Dark Road (1947)

We are Seven (1955)

Maggie (1958)

The Workhouse Graces (1959)

The Other End of the Bridge (1960)

Esmond (1962)

The Brimstone Halo (1965)

Mervyn Wall (1908-1997)

Born Eugene Welply into a wealthy professional family in Dublin, he was educated at Belvedere College, in Germany and at UCD. He subsequently worked as a higher civil servant, finally being Secretary of the Arts Council (1957-1975). His first published works were plays performed at the Abbey. His burlesque and comical satire of monastic Ireland, *The Unfortunate Fursey* (1946) was a cult success, ending as it did with the urbane devil agreeing a pact with the Church hierarchy giving them complete control of Ireland as the best way to achieve damnation. This was followed up with *The Return of Fursey* (1948). His two realist novels of the 1950s are light-hearted but disaffected critiques of post-independent Ireland, with an undercurrent of wry satire about work in the local and national civil service.

The Unfortunate Fursey (1946) (Dublin: Helicon, 1965)

The Return of Fursey (1948) (London: Pilot Press, 1948)

Leaves for the Burning (1953) (Dublin: Millington, 1952)

No Trophies Raise (1956) (London: Methuen, 1956)

Maurice Walsh (1879-1964)

Born at Ballydonoghue, near Listowel, Co. Kerry, in a family of ten children. Educated locally and then at St. Michael's, Listowel, he joined the Customs and Excise Service in 1901. He was posted to the Scottish Highlands which provided the settings for many of his novels. He transferred back to Dublin to the Irish Customs under the terms of the treaty. His very many novels and short stories are usually romantic adventures often in a historical setting, and often with a well-heeled Irish hero on a strenuous holiday in the Highlands. The stories and novels reflect a conventional view about manners and correct behaviour in the face of rivalries and conflicts. His books were extremely popular and often best-sellers and in great demand at libraries.

The Key Above the Door (1926) (Nairn: Balnain, 1992)

While Rivers Run (1928)

The Small Dark Man (1929) (London: W & R Chambers, 1930)

Blackcock's Feather (1932)

The Road to Nowhere (1934)

Green Rushes (1935)

And No Quarter (1937) (London: W & R Chambers, 1937)

Son of the Sword Maker (1938)

The Hill is Mine (1940) (London: W & R Chambers, 1941)

Thomasheen James (1941)

The Spanish Lady (1943)

The Man in Brown (1946)

Son of Apple (1947)

Castle Gillian (1948)

Danger Under the Moon (1954) (Leicester: Linford, 1998)

A Strange Woman's Daughter (1956)

Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957)

Born in London, youngest child of John Butler Yeats, he grew up mainly in Sligo with his maternal grandparents there being privately tutored, before returning to his parents' house in London in 1887 and attending art school. He worked as an illustrator first in Manchester then in Dartmouth from 1897. He married an Englishwoman Mary Cottenham in 1894. He formed a friendship with J.M. Synge with whom he shared walking holidays in the west of Ireland. This led to a joint-commission for a series of articles for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1905 in which he supplied the illustrations, also used later in Synge's *The Aran Islands* (1907). He returned to Ireland in 1910, first to Greystones, Co. Wicklow and then to Dublin. His artistic style developed to make him one of the most important Irish artists of the twentieth century. He designed sets for the Abbey Theatre where, at the Abbey's Peacock Theatre, three of his own plays were performed. His plays, in their indifference to conventional stagecraft and the apparent purposelessness of the characters seem to anticipate Samuel Beckett who was a personal friend. His narrative works were similarly idiosyncratic, often using a 'stream of consciousness' style' and blending the ridiculous with the serious.

Sailing, Sailing Swiftly (1933) (London: Putnam, 1933)

The Aramanters (1936) (London: William Heinemann, 1936)

The Charmed Life (1938) (London: Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1974)

Ah, Well; A Romance in Perpetuity (1942)

And To You Also (1944)

The Careless Flower (1947)

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- _____ *Malone Meurt* (1951) (New York: Grove Press, 2009).
- _____ *L'Innomable* (1952) (New York: Grove Press, 2009).
- _____ *Watt* (1953) (New York: Grove Press, 1994).
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- _____ *Hold Your Own and Have Another* (1963) (London: Corgi Books, 1963).
- Bowen, Elizabeth, *The Last September* (1929) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942).
- Broderick, John, *The Pilgrimage* (1961) (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004).
- Clarke, Austin, *Bright Temptation* (1932) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932).
- _____ *The Singing-Men at Cashel* (1936) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936).
- _____ *Sun Dances at Easter* (1952) (London: Andrew Melrose, 1952).
- Connell, Vivian, *The Chinese Room* (1943) (London: Corgi, 1966).
- Coyle, Kathleen, *A Flock of Birds* (1930) (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1999).
- Gogarty, Oliver St John, *As I was Going Down Sackville Street* (1937) (London: Sphere Books, 1968).
- _____ *Tumbling in the Hay* (1939) (London: Sphere Books, 1982).
- Hall, Radclyffe, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) (London: Virago, 1982).
- Hoult, Norah, *Poor Women* (1928) (London: The Scholartis Press, 1928).
- Joyce, James, *Dubliners* (1914) (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1993).
- _____ *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) (London: Penguin, 1996).
- Kavanagh, Patrick Joseph, *The Green Fool* (1938) (London: Penguin, 1975).
- _____ *Tarry Flynn* (1948) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
- Keane, Molly, *The Rising Tide* (1937) (London: Virago, 1984).

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- _____ *Lift Up Your Gates* (1946) (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946).
- Lawrence, D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) (London: Heinemann, 1961).
- McGahern, John, *The Dark* (1965) (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
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